The Hudson Review

a magazine of literature and the arts

Winter 1984-85

E-66

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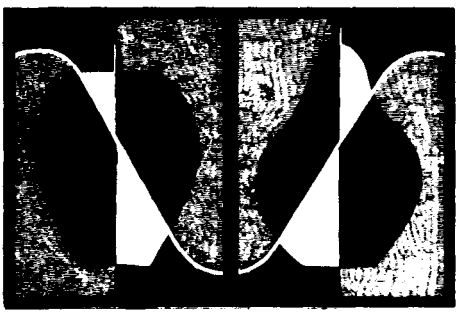

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Effective January 1, 1985, unsolicited mss will be read according to the following schedule: *Nonfiction:* January 1 through March 31, and October 1 through December 31; *Poetry:* April 1 through September 30; *Fiction:* June 1 through November 30. Unsolicited mss received at other times will be returned unread.

A new book by an Advisory Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW has been recently published. In accordance with our policy, the book will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD: *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered.* Oxford University Press. $15.95.

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ANTHONY POWELL

Bennett Award Acceptance Speech, 1984

Editors of *The Hudson Review* and assembled friends,

In expressing my appreciation to *The Hudson Review* as donors of this handsome award to commemorate Joseph Bennett, who, with Mr. Frederick Morgan, present with us here today, was one of the founders of the *Review*, I must say at once that it has long been one of my fantasies that the telephone would ring some sleepy summer afternoon, I should pick up the receiver, and a friendly voice would say: "Mr. Powell, we have decided to give you ten thousand pounds."

Something not so very far from that happened a month or two ago, proving that daydreams at times come true. At about half-past three, or quarter to four, when I was reading a book to be reviewed for my fortnightly stint in *The Daily Telegraph*, Fred Morgan from New York made this agreeable announcement.

I recall a popular song of my undergraduate days which went "When it's night-time in Italy. It's Wednesday over here," a truth one cannot learn too early in life, and I suppose in New York the hour was approaching ten o'clock in the morning, the moment when Mr. Morgan is accustomed to break such news.

A peculiar romance has for me always attached to the great river after which *The Hudson Review* is named. I wonder how many of those present at this luncheon felt the same thrill, as I did, as a child, at that opening sentence: "Whoever has made a voyage up The Hudson must remember the Kaatskill Mountains."

I always used to feel a strange excitement when I read, or probably had read to me, those words, introducing the river with its plain English name, and the mountains which, in contrast, sound so exotic and mysterious.

I have seen the Kaatskills only once, with their ever changing colours and seemingly ever changing shapes, then from a long way off on a picnic in Connecticut, but when I look back on my own life I often feel that, like Rip Van Winkle, I too was in the Kaatskill Mountains, with those odd personages dressed in strange outlandish fashion, playing ninepins, and taking frequent refreshment from their keg of excellent liquor.

I feel that, like Rip Van Winkle, I too sampled that keg, with the curious result that I woke up many years later among people even

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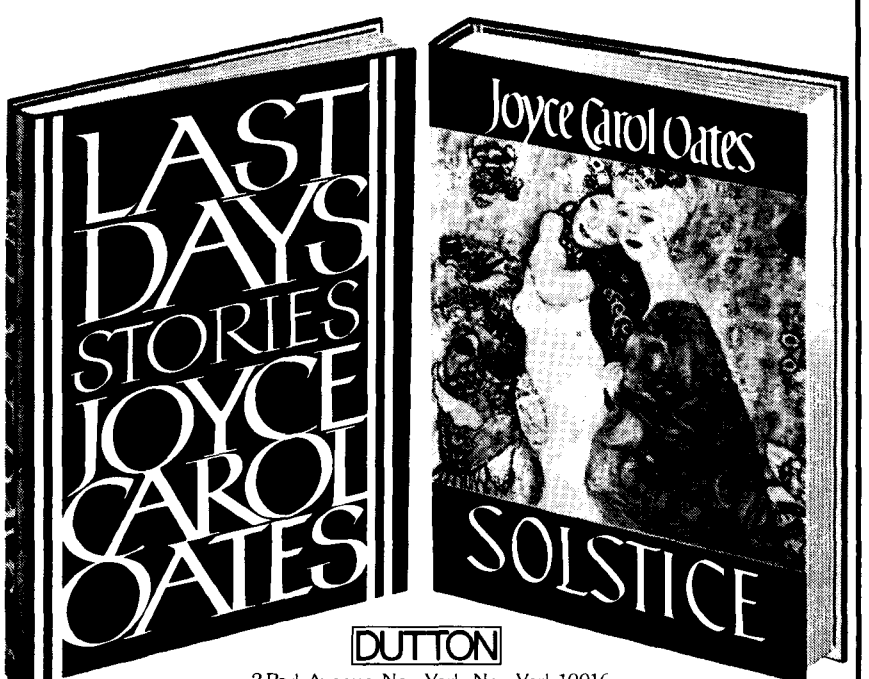
ERICA JONG, *New York Times Book Review**



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more outlandishly dressed, than formerly, playing nothing so humdrum as ninepins, and in general too remote from the world Rip Van Winkle remembered. I always, for example, sensed a particular sympathy for him, when, suffering from a twenty-years old hangover, Rip Van Winkle was pursued by a crowd—which no doubt included literary members of the Left Wing establishment—shouting: "A tory! A tory! . . . hustle him . . . away with him!"

I do not lightly invoke an American author in recording my thanks for this both flattering and substantial recognition from a transatlantic source. I am particularly glad to recall that the American writers who emerged after the first war—notably Cummings, Hemingway, Fitzgerald—were the young writers who opened my eyes to what was then a new sort of writing.

The Hudson Review was founded in 1948, after another world war, to give opportunity for a new generation, thirty years later, to show its mettle in writing. In doing that it is generally agreed that the *Review* radiantly succeeded, and no one is more grateful to *The Hudson Review* and its editors than myself today at this luncheon to celebrate by this prize the memory of its co-founder Joseph Bennett.

The above comments were made by Anthony Powell upon being presented with the 1984 Bennett Award at a luncheon at the U.S. Embassy in London on October 25, 1984.

Letter to the Editors

To the Editors,

Between your moving the Bennett Award to London (just for this one time, I hope) and my own recent travels abroad, I know my congratulations to the *Review* on this year's Bennett Award are a little late. But I prefer to think I am getting in the last word!

For all our fame as the headquarters city of the electronic media, New York continues to be distinguished as the home base of the American publishing industry, too—and guards that distinction just as proudly. For all its problems, that industry is still the most diverse and dynamic in the world; and *The Hudson Review*, an intellectual pathfinder for more than three decades, is a key reason why. From the many thought-provoking pieces published in your pages by writers of international renown to your selection of the estimable British author Anthony Powell as this year's Bennett Award-winner, it is clear the tradition continues.

New York City EDWARD I. KOCH, MAYOR

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URSULA K. LE GUIN

Time in the Valley

"How long have your people lived in the Valley?"

"All along."

But she looks puzzled, a little uncertain of the answer, because the question is strange. You wouldn't ask, "How long have fish lived in the river? How long has the grass grown on the hills?" and expect an exact answer, a date, a number of years . . .

Perhaps you would. Perhaps I would. And not unreasonably. After all, fish have lived in rivers only since fish, in the charted course of evolution, came to be. Most of the grasses that grow on the hills didn't grow on these hills until anno Domini 1759, when the Spanish came to sow their wild oats in California.

And the woman of the Valley is not altogether ignorant of that way of being minded, of the possibility of asking, and answering, those questions. But the use of the question and the truth of the answer might appear to her relative and not at all self-evident. If we kept pushing for dates and epochs, she might say, "You talk all beginnings and ends, spring and ocean but no river."

A story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, Aristotle said, and nobody has proved him wrong yet; and that which has no beginning and no end but is all middle is neither story nor history. What is it, then?

The universe of seventeenth-century Europe began 4400 years ago in the Middle East; the universe of twentieth-century North America began 24,000,000,000 years ago somewhere else with a big bang AND THERE WAS LIGHT, and they will end—that follows—in judgement with trumpets or in the thin, dark, cold soup of entropy. Other times, other places may not begin or end that way at all; consult the Universal History of the Hindus for one of the alternate views. Certainly the Valley doesn't share those beginnings or those ends, but it seems to have none of its own. It is all middle.

Surely they have a Creation Myth, an Origin Myth? Oh, yes, indeed they do.

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"How did people come to live in the Valley?"

"Oh, Coyote," she says. We are sitting now amid the alien corn, in the shade of the live oaks on the little slope across the creek just above the Hinge of Sinshan. The town pursues its activities off to our right—not a breakneck pursuit; occasionally a door closes, a hammer knocks, a voice speaks, but it is very quiet in the summer sun. To our left in the grove and sheep-cropped meadow where the five roofs of the heyimas are, nobody moves at all, except high overhead the Sinshan hawk crying his melancholy kee-eer! kee-eer!

"You know, Coyote was going along, and she saw this thing out on the water, on the sea-water, out past Hidai Point. She thought, 'I never saw anything like that before. I don't like it,' and she started throwing rocks at it, trying to sink it before it came to the shore. But it kept coming closer and closer, coming from the west, this thing moving around on the water where it was shining in the sun. Coyote kept picking up clods and rocks and throwing them, and she yelled, 'Go away! Go back!' But it came right up to the water just beyond the breakers. Coyote could see then it was people, human people, holding hands and dancing on the water. They were right on the water, like water-skater insects. They were singing, 'Hey! We're coming!' Coyote kept throwing rocks and clods, and they caught them and swallowed them, and kept on singing. They began to sink, they broke through the skin of the water, but by then they were through the breakers and across the bar, in the Mouths of the Na where the water's shallow, and they kept wading up the channels. Five of them, in the channels of the Mouths of the River. Coyote was scared. She was angry. She ran up into the Northeast Range, setting forest fires; she ran up around the Mountain to Clear Lake and got one of the volcanoes there to erupt, getting the air black with ashes; she ran back down the Southwest Range setting fires, with her tail on fire she came running back down, and at Te Shallows in the middle of the Valley she met those human people coming upstream. They were walking on the river bottom now. Ahead of them was fire and burning, smoke and ash, heat and darkness, a terrible wind full of embers and gas. Everything was burning. They kept walking on the river-

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bottom, through the water, very slowly, upstream. They were singing:

Hey, Coyote, we are coming!
You called us, you sang us,
Coyote, we are coming!

Then Coyote said, 'There's no use arguing with these people. I fed them dirt and stones and now they belong here. Next thing they'll come up out of the river onto the land. I'm going away.' She put her tail down low and went away up into the Southwest Range, up Bear Creek Canyon there, onto Sinshan Mountain. That's where she went.

"The people came up out of the River when the fires died out. For a long time they lived on rock and ashes and dirt and bones and charcoal. Then the forests began to grow again, and they began to gather and plant, and the animals came back, and they began to live together. So that's how the human people came here. It was Coyote."

Behind the ridges above the sacred place, to our left, is Sinshan Mountain, long, massive, and serene, the late sunlight marking one deep fold of shadow on its flank.

Let us not ask Thorn if she believes her story. I am not certain what the word 'believe' means in her language, or in mine. It is best simply to thank her for telling it.

"That's a Serpentine story," she says. "They tell it in the heyimas. The Blue Clay people have a song telling it, too. They sing it coming upstream from the Salt journey, you know. There's a good Adobe story. It's about people raining down out of the volcanoes. You might ask Red Plum to give it to you."

So we do that. It's a while before we find Red Plum, who isn't at home in her household in Five Hearth House. "I believe grandmother's at the heyimas," says her granddaughter—their word 'believe' in this sense indicates considerable uncertainty, or unwillingness to be precise. She suggests that we come around in the evening. When we do that, the old woman is there on the balcony, shelling beans. "I was drunk last night," she says, with a gleam of the eyes and a flickering,

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secret smile of satisfaction, not shared with us. She is small, rounded, fine-wrinkled, formidable. When we get around to asking for the story she does not seem disposed to share it either. "You don't want to hear that old stuff," she says.

Yes, we really do.

Unmistakably she is disappointed, expected better of us. "Anybody can tell that story," she says.

Her emphasis is on the word 'tell,' with the sense of 'repeat, recite.'

Long-legged, good-natured Thorn, who always feels responsible for us, says in a tone between deference and humoring, "But they want to hear you tell it, Red Plum." In this usage, 'tell' has the sense of 'say, speak,' with an indication of making or inventing. But Thorn's emphasis is on 'you.'

Is this then a myth we are to hear from Red Plum, or a tale, or an invention of her own, or some combination of those possibilities? There is no way to be sure. She is evidently quite vain, and Thorn may be merely flattering her; but if the story is actually hers, by gift or making, we are asking a considerable favor of her to give it to us. Uneasy, we bring out the tape recorder, intending to assure her that we will not use it without her permission, but as soon as she sees it, her manner changes. "Oh well," she says, "I have a terrible headache. I can't talk loud, it hurts my head. You'll have to put that machine up close. I haven't been that drunk for a long time. Stock says I was singing so loud he could hear me above ground. That's why I'm so hoarse, I suppose. Well, then, you wanted the story about where the people came from. Is that working now? The story tells about people coming out of the mountain when it erupted. Have you seen the mosaic wall in Chukulmas, the big picture in the house there they call Volcano House? It shows what it looked like when the mountain erupted."

Red Plum's stepson interrupts. "But that's not the same eruption—that picture's of the eruption a hundred years ago, four hundred years ago . . . "

He is probably speaking for our benefit, thinking that foreigners might get confused, but the old woman is annoyed. "Of course it isn't the eruption in the story! What do you want to go mixing things up for like that? What a fool! Maybe these people from outside the Valley have seen a volcano

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erupting and know what it looks like, but nobody living here at this time has seen one anywhere near here, and I've lived here more of this time than the rest of you . . . So there's a picture in Chukulmas, if you want to go there to see it. It's very dramatic. They used red glass for the fire. So then, there was a time, there was a place, some time, some place, in the Four Houses, heya, heya,

heya, heya,

heya, heya,

heya, heya, there was no time, there was no place. It was all bare, bareness was all. There was nothing, not any thing, there was not. Bare and thin, not light not dark, nothing moving nothing thinking. No shapes and no directions. The sea was all mixed up with the dream, death and eternity were the same, smooth, not moving or going, the waters mixed up with the sands of the beach and the air, so that there were no edges, no surfaces, no insides. Everything was in the middle of everything and nothing was anything. No river ran. In the sea and air and dirt the mortal souls were mixed in, mixed up, and they were bored, bored with no change and no moving and no thinking. They were bored, all that no-count time, all that no-time not being in no place. There was a boredom, a restlessness. They moved, in restlessness they moved, they shifted, those grains of sand, dust-grains, soul-motes, ashes. They started rubbing together a little, shifting around, falling a little, dancing a little, making a little noise, very soft, less than when you rub your finger and thumb together, less, less than that, but they heard the little shifty noise they were making, and made it louder. That was the first thing, the noise, the first thing made. They made that music, those mortal souls. They made the waves, the intervals, the tones: the rhythm, the measure, the beat. The sand singing, the dust singing, the ashes singing, our music started there. That is the music. That is what the world is still singing if you know how to listen, they say, if you know how to hear it. So our music starts with the dust singing, our musicians play that note to begin the music and to end it, and that is also the note you hear before you touch the drum. But still there was restlessness and wanting. So the music got louder and moved, it changed, the tone changing to make tunes and chords, the measure changing upon itself, so that things be-

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gan building up out of the music, crystals, and drops, and other shapes and forms. Things began to draw apart and pull into themselves; there were edges and meetings; there were outsides and insides; there were hinges and partings. There were things and spaces between things, and the sea with waves and breakers, the clouds moving with the wind in the air, the mountains and valleys in the land, shapes of rock and kinds of dirt, they came to be, they came to pass. But still the souls in the sand and dust were restless, and some more than others. The coyote soul was in some of those sand-grains, some of those dust-motes. The coyote soul wanted more kinds of music, chords with more voices, disharmonies, crazy rhythms, more going on. The coyote soul began moving and shifting. It let the dust and sand lie there and pulled itself together out of everywhere, out of everything, from all the beaches and plains and deserts. Doing that, pulling itself together, it left gaps behind, holes in the world, empty places. By unmaking it made darkness. So light came in to fill the holes: stars, sun, moon, planets came to be. Shining began. Brightness came to pass. Where Coyote had pulled things apart, the rainbows came to be to bridge the gaps. Across those bridges the Four-House People came walking. They came shining and walking into the earth world, and there was Coyote standing with her tail down and her head down, shivering, and looking around. There was a lot of music going on now, loud, too much of it, everything shaking and trembling and rumbling, earthquake everywhere, where Coyote had pulled loose and left gaps and darkness. 'Hey! Coyote!' the people of the Four Houses said, standing on the rainbows, looking down, calling down. But Coyote didn't know how to answer. She didn't know how to talk. In the earth world nobody had spoken. There was no speaking, only music. So Coyote sang the coyote music. She put her head up in the air towards the people and howled. The people on the rainbow laughed at her. They said, 'All right, Coyote, we'll teach you how to talk.' And they tried to do that. One of them would say a word, and the word flew from the mouth, an owl; the next word was a bluejay, the next a quail, the next word was a hawk. One of those people spoke puma. One of them spoke deer. One spoke a word that came out in long leaps, it was jackrabbit, and the next word came out hopping, it was cot-

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tontail rabbit. One of them spoke the oak trees. They spoke the alder, the madrone, the digger pine. They spoke the wild oats and the grapevines. They talked, and their words were all the people of the earth, bears and pondscum and condors and lice. They talked grass, they said dragonflies. Coyote tried to learn to talk as they did, but she couldn't do it; she just howled. However she shaped her mouth, nothing came out of it but the howling songs. The sky people laughed, and so did the earth people. Coyote was ashamed. She put her head down and ran to the mountain. We say she ran to Ama Kulkun, because this is our story, but you understand that it might be Kulkun Eraian, or a mountain that we know nothing of, a mountain of that time, that place, that it is a mountain in the Four Houses. So she ran to the mountain of the Eighth House, of the wilderness. In her shame and anger she went inside the mountain. It was her heyimas. It was the heyimas, the sacred house of the wilderness. In there, inside, in the darkness, Coyote ate her anger and drank her shame, ate the fire in the earth, drank the boiling sulphur springs. In there with her will she went into herself, deep in, and made there in the darkness the he-coyote. There in her womb she made him. There in the mountain she gave birth to him. While he was being born, coming out, he shouted, 'Coyote is talking! Coyote is saying this word!' After the he-coyote was born she fed him with her milk, and when he was grown they came out of the mountain, on the mountainsides in the chaparral, and mated. The other people watched and saw that, and they all began mating then, too. It was a big festival, that day. That was the first Moon Dance, and they danced it all over the earth. But there inside the mountain, in the heyimas of the wilderness, where Coyote had eaten out the inside, it was hollow, a big, dark cave or gap, and this hollow filled up with people, all crammed together. Where did they come from? Maybe from Coyote's afterbirth, maybe from her turds, or maybe she tried to talk there inside the mountain and spoke them; nobody knows. They were in there, crammed in the dark, and so the mountain began speaking. It talked. It said fire, lava, steam, gas, ash. It erupted, and with the ashclouds and the fiery pumice flying out, the human people came flying out too, spewing up, raining down all over the forests, all over the hills and valleys of the world.

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At first they set a lot of fires, but when they cooled off they settled down where they landed and began living there, making houses and heyimas, getting along with the other people. We say that we landed closest to the mountain, we didn't fly as far so we didn't hit as hard, and we stayed smarter than the other people who live in other places. They got the sense knocked out of them. Anyhow, so here we are, the children of Coyote and the Mountain, we are their turds and their words, so they say, and so it began, they say. Heya, heya, heya, heya, heya."

If we went to another village, or another heyimas, or another teller of tales, we could no doubt obtain another Origin Myth; but let us now thank Red Plum (who smiles secretively) and go on up the Valley eighteen miles or so to Wakwaha, Holy on the Mountain, where the computers are.

'Cycles' of fifty years and 'gyres' of four hundred and fifty, referred to in some documents and used by archivists as a dating system, seem to be of little significance in daily usage. Most people can tell you what year of a cycle it is, and these figures are useful for keeping track of vintages, birthdays, the age of a building or an orchard, and so on, just as with us, but they are not invested with a character of their own, as our years and cycles are (1984, the twenties, the thirteenth century, etc.), nor is New Year's Day a festival. In fact there is some confusion about what day it is. Formally, it is the fortieth day after the solstice of winter (the forty-first day in leap years, every fourth); but in the Planting Lodge the new year is spoken of as beginning at the equinox of spring, and popularly and in poetry the year begins when the new grass begins to grow and the hills turn green, along in November or December. People seldom know what day of the year it is (they are counted straight forward from one to 365) unless they are concerned with managing some ritual activity that is counted out in days, and then they are more likely to count from and to the full moons. The great festivals are determined by the solar and lunar calendar; all other activities, meetings of councils, lodges, arts, and so on, are usually arranged by agreement to meet again in four days or five days or nine days after the next full moon, or when somebody asks for a meeting. All the same, years, cycles of years, and cycles of cycles exist, and with them as foundation, surely we can

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begin to place the Valley in history, here at the Exchange.

The only person in the Exchange at the moment is Gather, a man of sixty, whose lifelong passion has been the retrieval of data concerning certain doings of human beings in the Valley of the Na. At last we have met a historically-minded person, and now we'll get somewhere! But there are problems. Gather gladly shares with us the programs he has worked out for obtaining data—overwhelming quantities of data—and will even help us get paper if we want it all printed out so we can take it home to read, but his approach to the material is not historical. His principle of ordering the information he obtains is not even chronological. To him, it appears, chronology is an essentially artificial, almost an arbitrary arrangement of events—an alphabet as opposed to a sentence.

Surely the Memory Banks are chronologically ordered?

Yes, that is one system of data classification; but there are so many systems, all cross-indexed, that unless you know how to limit your program very cannily, a request for the data in chronological order on even a minor cultural phenomenon, say the etymology of the word ganais, or the methods of leaching the tannin from acorns, may result in several hundred pages of print-out, almost entirely statistical. Where in all the data is the information? Gather has spent his life finding out how to find out.

His interest is domestic architecture. He is a member of the Wood Art. It seems he has not done much building; his interest is intellectual, almost abstract, a fascination with the formal significance and occurrence of certain architectural elements and proportions. It is these he seeks through the hundreds or thousands of years of accumulated data, the billions of trillions of bits in the Memory.

He brings onto the display for us a beautiful computer-generated plan of a house. The display is not in dots of light on green jello, but crisp black on matte white, like an unusually well-printed page, and is about a yard square; if color display were relevant, it would be in color. The image revolves till he holds it at the angle he wants. What he hopes we will see is a certain proportion, the mathematical scheme of a certain building, which he adores as an ideal. We would need a good deal of training to see that, but we can see that this

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house is beautiful, and please him by saying so; and that it is also quite different from any house we have seen in the Valley. So after a while we inquire, "When was this house built?"

"Oh, a long time ago."

"A gyre? More, do you think?"

"Oh, a great deal more, I think—but I didn't record the length of time . . . " He is getting flustered, feeling our disappointment as disapproval. He thinks that we're thinking, *just like a man*! "I'd have to reprogram for that information, of course that's no trouble, it would take a little time—I just didn't . . . think the date was of any interest." We reassure him as best we can. "Here," he says, "I think I came at this set chronologically," and, hopeful of retrieving our good opinion, he brings onto the display another set of plans and elevations: a delightful little temple. "A heyimas above ground," he explains. "That is, let me see, here, yes," and the screen flashes sets of figures faster than the untrained eye can follow, "two thousand six hundred and two years ago from now, in Rekwit, I think, yes, where Rekwit is at this time, I mean, of course."

"But Rekwit isn't in the Valley."

"No. Over across the Inland Sea somewhere." Geography doesn't interest him either. "Now here's something quite similar the Memory gave me." Another little temple or house. "That's in a place called Bab, on the old south continent, let me see, well, about four hundred years ago from now, or two thousand two hundred years ahead of that one in Rekwit. Do you see the same three-two proportion?" He is off again, and we have to let him ride his hobbyhorse a while; his relief and pride in having got us what we wanted, a date, are infectious.

Eventually I can mount my own hobbyhorse again, asking cautiously, "How would one obtain data on primitive life here in the Valley?"

Gather scratches his jaw. "Well, in the times of primitive life, there was no Valley of the Na, I think? This continent wasn't here . . . "

Ever and again one runs into this bedrock of the Valley mind, the 'common knowledge' of the people, what is perhaps their true mythology: unquestioned, unreasoned, (though questionable and reasonable), traditional lore: the

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general outlines of what we would call historical geology, including plate tectonics, of the theory of evolution, of astronomy (unsupported by any telescope capable of seeing the outer planets), and of certain elements of classical physics, along with elements of a physics not familiar to us.

After a little mutual explanation and laughter, we establish that what I meant was primitive *human* life. But this combination of words does not mean much to Gather, nor to the computer. When requested for assistance in obtaining information on primitive human life in the Na Valley, the Exchange, after a brief communion with itself, reports that there is no such information.

"Ask about information on primitive human life anywhere."

With this, Gather and the Exchange begin to ask each other questions, and to get results, and presently (he keeps the display in the graphic mode, since we aren't trained in TOK) they begin to come onto the screen: little broken hominid teeth, bones, maps of Africa with dots, maps of Asia with dashes. . . But that's the Old World. What about this one? O brave new world, that has no people in it!

"They came across a land bridge," I say doggedly, "from the other continent—"

"From the west," Gather says, nodding. But is he talking about the same people I'm talking about?

The ones that were met by Coyote?

That mythology, that unquestioned tribal knowledge that includes plate tectonics and bacteriology, must include what I'm after. "What were the beginnings of the way you live here, of the nine towns? When was Wakwaha founded—how long ago? What people lived here before then?"

"All the people," Gather says, confused again. He is an insecure person who finds life difficult and retreats easily; he has spent his life much alone here, in communication without relation.

"I mean human people." It is very hard for me to keep in mind that 'people' in this language includes animals, plants, dreams, rocks, etc. "What human people lived here before your people?"

"Just our people—like you—"

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"But of a different way of life—foreigners—like me." I don't know how to translate 'culture' into his language more exactly, and the word 'civilization,' of course, won't do at all.

"Well, ways always change. They never stay the same, even when they're very good ways, very beautiful, like that house, you know. They stopped building like that, but then maybe somebody else does it, in another time, another place . . . "

It's hopeless. He doesn't perceive time as a direction, let alone a progress, but as a landscape in which one may go any number of directions, or nowhere. He spatializes time; it is *not an arrow, nor a river, but a house, the house he lives in.* One may go from room to room, and come back; to go outside, all you have to do is open the door.

We thank Gather, and go down the steep street-path-steps of Wakwaha and past the Hinge, the Springs of the River, and into the dancing place. The roofs of the five heyimas of Wakwaha are thirty and forty feet high at the apex of the stepped and ornamented pyramid, the four-sided roof that rests upon the five-sided underground chamber. On past the dancing place in a grove of magnificent young madrone trees is the long, low, stuccoed adobe, tile-roofed Library of the Madrone Lodge of Wakwaha. The Archivist greets us.

"If you don't have a history," I say to her, "how am I to tell your story?"

"Is a ladder the way to climb the mountain?" she says.

I sulk.

"Listen," says the Archivist—they're always saying that, these people, very gently, not an order but an invitation, "Listen, you'll find or make what you need, if you need it. But consider it; be mindful; be careful. What is history?"

"A great historian of my people said: the study of man in time."

There is a silence.

"You aren't Man and you don't live in Time," I say bitterly. "You live in the Dream Time."

"Always," says the Archivist of Wakwaha. "Right through Civilization, we have lived in the Dream Time." And her voice is not bitter, but full of grief, bitter grief.

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JOHN RIDLAND

Aria for Tarzan's Father

> On a bright May morning in 1888, John, Lord Greystoke, and Lady Alice sailed from Dover on their way to Africa.
>
> A month later they arrived at Freetown where they chartered a small sailing vessel, the *Fuwalda*, which was to bear them to their final destination.
>
> And here John, Lord Greystoke, and Lady Alice, his wife, vanished from the eyes and from the knowledge of men.
>
> —Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), Chapter 1, "Out to Sea."

O England far away
Past the perimeter of this scimitar bay
Whereon the combers play
Like mowing rollers on
An English lawn,

O England never to be seen
Again beyond the virid green
Binding this beach whereon we stand between
The devil and the deep marine-
Blue sea,

O England, *be*
What only castaways can truly see,
Home of the feral and the free,
The craven and the brave,
Servant and slave.

Long may this vast Atlantic lave
Your rocky shores! Long may it wave,
The criss-cross red white blue
Lashed over you
Like bacon rashers on a breakfast plate.

Our bitter fate
Lodges us here apart

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From every comfort skill and art
Have so ingeniously combined
To ease the body and the mind—

Post office, loo,
Andirons, fireplace, flue,
Tea shop, hotel, and omnibus—
Now lost to us—
Photographer's salon, gas ring, and telegraph,

The morning *Times*, the loyal staff,
Lord Elgin's famous marbles rippling
Under their skin, the Works of Mr. Kipling,
Of Mr. Dickens, uniformly bound,
Each book a pound.

But here where fruit falls off the trees
With every breeze
And mealy ant-eggs take the place
Of those brown beauties our white race
Delights to face
In silver egg-cups with a silver spoon,
We change our jolly tune,
Our melancholy
Wells as we think of ripening holly
Bringing along
Crisp Christmas with its Yuletide song.

While you our English son—
Doomed now, alas! to be the only one—
Though you grow tall and strong
Will you remember long
All that we stood for, all that England stands
Upon, in distant lands
Like these,
Or there at home
In Beaconsfield or Brome,
Recorded in these books we brought
For your dear Mother to have taught
Your patient ABCs?

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Or will you, as we fear,
Drop all that we hold dear,
And swing out wildly from us like an ape
Towards some new-fangled shape
Dangling before you as a clump of grapes
Or lewd bananas?
The wind of the savannahs
Swells louder than the pale hosannahs
Of our bare ruined choir,
Hums like a telegraph wire,
And only blood is left to tell
What breeding would impel
In English hill or dell,
Far from this leafy hell
Of frightful change
In which our feelings range,
Becoming beasts at dusk
Savage of claw and tusk—
These very ones now crouching to devour
Our ultimate and penultimate hour.

Aria for Lady Alice, Tarzan's Mother

> Lady Greystoke never recovered from the shock of the great ape's attack, and, though she lived for a year after her baby was born, she was never again outside the cabin, nor did she ever fully realize that she was not in England.
>
> —Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), Chapter 3, "Life and Death."

Now we are Home again
Inside our kind demesne
Where every corner's tucked in tight and snug
And carpet sweepers whisk
The slightest risk
From every Oriental rug;
Behind each door

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The servants poise once more
Alert at any tinkle
To hasten out and bring
Whatever boon it is for which we ring,
Or take away our petticoats and frocks
To iron out any damp or wrinkle;
Now our box
Is booked at the Savoy
In order that we may enjoy
Whatever innocent merriment
The hand of Mr. D'Oyly Carte has blent;
Now I can pluck
My failing courage up,
Fortified by a Fortnum and Mason's cup
And two Digestive
Biscuits, no longer restive
At that hard backhand stroke of luck
Which laid us helpless
On a yelping shore;
But now once more
(Not to be silly) yelpless,
Save for our little pup,
Sweet harmless brute,
With full maternal feeling
I hear the tender squealing
Reaching me of our tiny lad,
Our fair first fruit:
All that are brutal, rude, or merely bad
I banish by the simple strategem
Of ordering them
Be gone!
And they are gone.
If not, Lord John
Will see to them,
As now he winds the clocks,
Reminding Time
To mind its ticks and tocks
And chime;
And turns his long keys in their proper locks.

Yet harken!

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Even as what my eyes
Descry now somewhat thins,
My senses darken
As here I muse reclining—
I view with some alarm
(They cannot do me harm)
The rudeness of these furnishings,
Odd vases, and these skins
Of panther and of lion lining
The strangely rustic floor,
The mighty door,
The grain
Of whose contiguous layers
Running transversely moves me to strange mirth
By its enormous girth—
I cannot quite explain—
The burnishings
Cast by the open fire
Seem to declare
Something or someone is not there
That I require,
Or *is*, that I do not.
Ring for the servants, please:
As if the bell were dumb
They do not come.
Have they forgot?
I've no wish to complain,
And yet, I fear,
We must obtain
Another set—
And yet, and yet,
I do not know,
I love these darlings so.
Ah! there's the lad,
Lusty as ever—
What a strapping chap.
Do please ask Nurse to bring him to my lap,
And after he has fed,
We'll turn the lamplight down and climb
The tall stairs to those separate beds
In which we dream the pleasures scarce describable
To which the married state is liable.

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ANN HAYES

Of Other Wars

Those old wars linger: some who didn't live
Tangle their bones as we fight on above
In other wars. We cut and place new stones,
Now that we've time again, we dig new graves,
And plant an English garden in the grass.

It's Picardy, Champagne, the Somme, the Marne.
Under their dates and names Americans
Wait with caretakers for the visitors
Whose century this is, who have the time
To see a field of crosses and of stars.

It's Picardy. Thick walls above the road
Are crevices of flowers, tracing lines,
A fortress castle closing off the north
When men of England fought the men of France,
Destroyed each other for a century.

Campanula and thrift and cheddar pinks
Grow in the milles fleurs of a tapestry,
The soft familiar. Here beside the road
Run the brown rabbits that a weaver saw.
At Bayeux they are brown embroidery.

I walked a room, I watched the hangings show
King Edward speak and then Duke Harold ride
Across the linen, wade into the sea,
Board and set sail. He landed and was caught,
Ransomed by William, swore his loyalty.

Or so the Normans say. In woolen thread
And lively as cartoons men ride and feast,
Rescue each other, fight, escape, and pray.

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Thread takes the shape of stars, of fables told,
Of men who plow and sow and tend their fields.

It is God's plenty, like the later tales.
Hounds hunt, a stag is caught, we see ships built,
Supplies brought into camp. A house is burned,
A hawk pursues a hare, there's fantasy
Of dragon, amphisbaena, firedrake.

It moves like film, one scene into the next,
A long close-up, a fade. The border frames
Accompany what happened: griffons, doves,
A rabbit hides, returns, two peacocks plume
To meet the day that comes, the reckoning.

Then men in chain mail brace against the fight,
Ride at each other, hack at man and horse.
There is no blood upon the tapestry
But both the borders fill with broken men,
A realism, an embroidery.

Utah and Omaha are on the sea,
Not far from Bayeux's hangings, history,
Beachheads that led to roads in Normandy,
Hedgerows and ditches for the infantry,
The road to Paris and to victory.

For Giselbertus the Stone-Carver

Translate the soft impermanent
Confusion of a thought
Into the hard-edged ornament
An old stone-mason wrought:

Then here the magi lie in bed
Under a coverlet,

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In rippling stone from toes to head
The traveling kings have met.

One lies asleep, and peacefully
Pursues perhaps the star.
The next is waking, possibly
To wonder where they are.

The third's awake. His eyes are wide,
A hand is touching his:
Behind his shoulder, by his side,
The serious angel is.

O wide awake! And starting so—
The covers yet are still—
About to find his feet and go
Where the vision will.

It's cut in stone. Yet over here
Lies unrepentant Eve
Just reaching back to catch the sphere,
No harm she can conceive.

Above the sleeping new-born then
The mother's tenderness
Puts out her hand to touch her son:
The infant marvelous.

We meet what some stonecutter knew,
Or Giselbertus wise,
From both the Eves the baby grew
To open sleeping eyes.

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HOLLIS ROWAN SEAMON

Middle-aged Martha Anne

Middle-aged, middle-aged Martha Anne
Lived alone in a frying pan.
'Til the cook threw in grease
And Martha slid to her release,
Never to be burned again, again,
Never to be burned again.

Nonsense rhymes were continually spawned in Martha's brain, fidgeting there until she gave them voice and let them out. The only way to get rid of them, she knew by now, was to supply them with reasonable rhyme and some sort of rhythm, and then they would obligingly take form in the air and be gone.

So middle-aged Martha Anne, cooking bacon in her frying pan, sang her little song and then was free to eat her breakfast in something very like peace. Her kitchen clock ticked earnestly, her tea kettle bubbled brightly. The late summer sun slanted across the table, tickling the edges of the asters in the vase. The air was full of lingering dew. Back, Martha thought, in her olden days, she would have slept past the dew, dressed in alarm, gulped too hot tea, and spilled herself upon the mercy of bus drivers in her rush to the office, where she could fall halfway back to sleep over television jingles and magazine ads, which she wrote. And rewrote and rewrote until their infantile strains had infected her dreams and impaired her ability to think in straightforward prose.

As who would want to anyway, day after day after day? Martha wondered as she washed her dishes in her awfulorange (one word, her own) sink. The house where she now lived, following her flight from her city townhouse and the world of work, was not what one would expect if one dreamt dreams of solitary retreats as rustic cabins upon isolated, flower-starred hills. There were no darkening pines, nor even

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crude water pumps to make the house romantic, the proper abode of a hermit or half-mad poet. It was just a small cheaply built house on the edge of a farm, originally meant to accommodate hired hands, whose hands were no longer needed, as so much of the farm had fallen away, field after field become house lots and developments and the farmer grown rich on harvests of banker's green. The hired man's house had, in earlier days, been lived in by countless restless workers, coming and going like breezes, each decorating bits and pieces of the house and leaving a cumulative design in walls of many colors.

Martha often wondered who had chosen the awfulorange sink, and stove and refrigerator set and then who had capped them off with the brilliantly speckled magenta linoleum floor. When Martha redecorated the house she left the kitchen quite alone, a masterpiece of a sort, contenting herself with painting the living room walls ivory (in defiance of their previous puce) and her bedroom walls blue. Except for the bathroom, that's all there was to the house, and quite enough.

Martha had removed the plaster elves and lantern-bearing pickaninnies from the yard, but did not destroy them (for the good of humanity, as her son suggested) but allowed them to gambol for all time in the ripe darkness of the abandoned chicken shed, where she believed they spoke on Christmas Eve, although the substance of their conversation with the shades of departed hens was beyond even her imagining. The house, the yard, even the village to which they were attached by dint of postal obligation were, in short, absolutely tacky, and Martha loved them all, for she owed them nothing and they surrounded her with pleasant impersonality, a gift. She did not plan to leave them for a long while yet, despite Justin's constant pleas, calling often, asking her to come home. A kind man, her son, if a bit blind to his mother's needs, as who, all told, is not?

Dishes done (sparkling clean, shining like a dream), Martha donned her old woolen sweater for her walk into town for her mail and daily dram of groceries. The need of the sweater brought foreboding of fall and Martha shivered. Last winter the house had been more than a little cold, frost forming on the inside walls at night, for she had refused to listen to

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reason or neighborly advice, and cover the outer window frames with opaque plastic, which might have kept a bit of winter out, but would surely have kept Martha in, unable to see outside at all. And she needed to see the bird feeders, to gauge their fullness and to watch the birds at their meals. Thirteen different varieties had come, on one glorious frost-bitten morning: first the plain brown sparrows, then the juncos and chickadees, soon titmice had come along, bringing with them the nuthatch and the finches, red, purple and yellow finches all aglow, lit along the sunflower feeders; the mourning doves squatted on the ground, catching drops, too placid to annoy the screaming jays, their blue like lightening on the snow. The evening grosbeaks joined in, brushing wings kindly with the unpopular starling and blackbird. Finally, like a benediction, like grace without prayer, came the cardinals. That day of riches still glowed in Martha's mind, whittling away winter's sharp edge.

And still, Martha thought as she started down the road, still it was quite warm yet, September just half over and the sun trailing summer behind it.

She strode quickly along, exercising her heart and lungs, if not her soul. At the dusty little post office the woman gave her her mail with a smile, mostly catalogs, some already full of Christmas wares (toys and joys for girls and boys). She bought her supper needs at the grocery store where she chatted with the clerk, a lovely bald man with glasses and an undaunted ability to draw pleasure from each day's conversations about weather and gardens and such. Martha headed home, taking the long way, her contact with mankind done for this day, a contact small but satisfying, amply nourished by mutual interest in the commonplace. She looked forward to settling in at home with the catalogs, spying out all sorts of lovely things which she might order, for herself and Justin and Judith.

After lunch Martha would enjoy her nap, a tiny one, upright in the blue chair, a mere touch of sleep to give piquancy to an afternoon of wakefulness. Waking, she would garden, read, listen to the radio and cook, if she felt like it. Late in the afternoon, on fine days, her landlord, the wealthy retired farmer, eighty-odd years old, would often visit and they

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would sit on the peeling porch and talk, or not, as they pleased. Mr. Bell would most often talk of days far gone and people whom Martha had never known but who had come to interest her, as tales of their lives drifted about her porch and lawn and settled in the window boxes among the impatiens. Nighttime, Martha watched Mystery Theater or Great Performances on PBS, never deigning to flick to other stations, where she might, God forbid, hear one of her own inane ads. She would sleep early, and well.

With this day all stretched before her, Martha walked home. On the final bit of the walk, she passed one of the farmer's last cornfields. The corn was her measure of the passage of time, more accurate than most. In May the field was brown sweet-smelling dirt. In June the new corn reached her knees, in July her waist, in August her shoulders, and now in September waved far above her head. In October it would become a field of stubble, studded with a few missed ears. Today the corn rustled with huge green energy, full of frantic whisperings and signs. Martha quickened her steps just slightly and was bravely hurrying past the looming plants when she heard the cry from within the corn.

She quashed her urge to run away and stood on the edge of the road, her ear bent to the inner green, and listened. The cry came again, high and pitiful. A cat, Martha thought in relief, just a cat. Here, Kitty, she called, bending down at the very first line of stalks, peering into the corn, here kitty, kitty, kitty. (Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been? I've been in a field, all green all green. Pussy cat, pussy cat, what did you do? I trapped old ladies, all blue, all blue). The cat's cry was momentarily silenced by Martha's voice but soon resumed, higher and more frantic, a plea from somewhere inside the corn.

All right, Martha thought, I'm coming, kitty. I'm coming. Martha was fond of cats and only did not own one because it was such a cliché for a middle-aged lady living alone to keep a cat and tell her friends endless stories of its adorable antics. The cat kept hollering, in hope now, and Martha blundered her way into the tall corn, pushing away the sharp-edged leaves that reached curiously for her face and neck. The light in the corn was completely different from ordinary sunlight—

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pale green and full of floating specks. Martha felt choked and fought panic as she crashed about, calling, here, kitty. The cat's answer came back to her and she followed it as best she could without foundering among the protruding roots of the corn plants. She really did not wish to fall dead, to nourish the field with her fertile flesh. (I enjoyed the earth, now the earth's enjoying me). She pleaded with the cat, here kitty, please come here kitty.

The cat just kept on wailing and Martha just kept on blundering about until they found each other at last, clear on the far edge of the cornfield. (Martha, had she known, could have walked quite easily and safely around the field). The cat's apparent obstinacy in not coming was made clear. Her leg was caught in a fox trap, the grey fur all crushed and bloody. Her yellow eyes made clear the fact that she'd felt herself doomed, but now didn't, quite. Oh, poor kitty, Martha whispered, and then, city-bred Martha Anne, never having seen a fox trap (nor a fox), opened one with her bare hands and set free the cat, who could not walk, and had to be carried quickly, wrapped in Martha's wool sweater. The crushed leg had begun to bleed heavily with the release of the pressure of the trap, and Martha ran home with her, crooning, poor, poor, kitty. She put her straight into the car, which luckily started after months of disuse, and drove to the nearest vet.

Who said he'd better put the cat to sleep and had Martha noticed the cat's pregnancy and what's more, advanced state of starvation? Unlikely to live or to produce quick kittens, at any rate. And Martha, said no. Let's not kill this cat. Let's try to save her. And the vet said, who will pay for the surgery and Martha said, I will, and the cat's yellow eyes closed in anesthetic sleep as the vet removed her useless leg and she awoke in Martha's house in a box lined with baby blankets (25 years old, from Justin's infancy and soft with many washings). The cat slept again and again, then woke to lap cream and then to stand and stretch on three legs as though she'd never had four. The cat obviously intended to live and the kittens within, by their deep underskin movements, showed that they too scorned hunger and fox traps and the tricks of vets and were bound for life.

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So Martha came to own a three-legged pregnant cat and was fond of its company in the little house and fed it prodigiously and watched with full joy its belly grow and shift in the sunlit mornings. Martha felt quite unalone and was surprised when Justin called on the phone again in the last week of September, to ask how she was doing up there all by herself.

(Just I myself and me, a jolly noisy three) Martha thought, but said, "I'm fine, Justin, just fine, and how are you and Judith?"

"Fine. Really great," answered Justin. "But I'd like to see you, Mom. I need to talk to you. Can I come up tomorrow?"

"Of course, lovely. Yes, please do Justin. I'll make a cheesecake."

The receiver down, Martha thought, dear, dear, whatever will the man in the grocery think when I buy three packages of cream cheese, and after all the cream lately too. He'll expect to see me grown fat as a balloon soon, she laughed. (Soon a balloon or was it buffoon?) She shrugged away her worry—she knew Justin would ask her to go home again and she would have to turn him down, again, that's all.

In the twittering fall evening, for the earth had now turned away from summer, Martha lay in her bed and remembered Justin, her son. Not that she'd not seen him often, even since her move, but still she liked to remember. Her thoughts fled backward from the tall bearded man he was to the child he'd been and she stroked her memories like a cat. She saw again the awkward, trembly-souled teenager, the golden-haired boy with the baseball bat, the toddler with a rubber ball, the baby in the cradle. She caressed the images no one else would ever carry, his father's memories gone into the grave. Martha rubbed the cat's taut belly as her thoughts wandered; and the cat slept soundly on the quilt beside her.

Oh, kitty, she thought, the tricks the world plays on mothers. Forcing us, beyond our power to resist, to love our children with an intensity we could hardly have dreamed of, before. And then, to take them, by steps away. If they die (as had Justin's infant sister), the loss tears apart our souls, our guts are almost burned away with the pain. If they live, we lose them still—lose the baby flesh whose very smell was pre-

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cious, lose the toddler curls that brushed our face as the small head rested on our shoulder, lose the sturdy bruised knees as they're forced into school pants, lose eventually, the trust and finally the need. And the great grown son, the good successful man, is no recompense. None at all.

The cat, so full of its own impending children, had no answer and Martha felt comforted by the absolute lack of one. That Justin should care to see her, would be enough. That Justin loved her she did not doubt. Her only living child, he had come to her without hesitation when her need was great, when Jack died and the terror of loneliness had battered her. That Jack should die, at fifty, falling flatly, untreatably, irrevocably dead upon the tweed carpet of his office, with Justin grown and gone, and leave Martha alone with nothing but the agency job and her vast and beautiful townhouse, was unthinkable. Martha could not have conceived it. When the flurry of women friends had subsided around her, their wave of support gone back to their living husbands and jobs and gracious homes (the homes requiring such care, these days, such exquisite nurturing care, more even than the children), Martha was left to spin in circles of despair. She could not be, alone, the Martha Anne she knew, the woman of means (her husband's), the woman of grace (her own), the woman of plenty (her son). She was falling, floating when Justin came home.

Justin had come back to their townhouse, putting up, she was certain although he would never say so, with "Mama's boy" remarks from his fraternity brothers as he left the frat house. He had refilled her house with his presence. The bright rooms had lost their vast echoes and she had, once again, reason to put flowers on the breakfast table, and greens and holly on the mantle at Christmas.

Then, when Justin married Judith, two springs ago, (Justin and Judith and Jack, brought to you today by the letter J) Martha had left. She felt they needed privacy, and she felt, quite suddenly, that she didn't need them any more. And she'd found this lovely-awful house, much to Justin's dismay, and lived in it, in singular unexpected peace. That's all, except for the family fiction, which was that middle-aged Martha Anne, in search of herself, had gone to follow her true

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talent as a writer, to forsake the ads and to WRITE, in capitals. That she hadn't put pen to paper in over a year, did not dispute the idea, for no one knew it but Martha herself, who had no intention of writing anything, ever. But let them think so, an easy explanation. Martha Anne shifted onto her side in bed, and slept.

At 11:15 the next morning, Justin arrived and Martha held him tightly in her arms, enclosing for a moment the infant and the child and the man as best she could. They sat down to cheesecake and coffee and talk. Or really, Justin talked, seeming to have memorized his little speech on the highway. "Mom, I have great news." His eyes asked her to think it great. "Judith's pregnant. And, Mom, we really want you to come home now. Listen, we've thought it all out, We can fix up the top floor of the house into an apartment. You'll have all the privacy you need. We've already started to put a kitchen up there. A very nice one." He just avoided shuddering at the kitchen in which they sat.

"Judith is going to keep on at school, Mom, right up until the baby comes, studying to pass the bar. And after, well, we know she'll find a place in a good firm and we'll have plenty of money for sitters, and you'll be free to be with the baby, but you'll have time to write too, and . . ."

Justin's breath finally collapsed and he looked at Martha quietly. "We'd like you to come home."

Martha felt betrayed by her instantly filled eyes. She fiddled with the coffee pot before speaking. "Justin, that's wonderful news. A grandchild. How lovely. How grand! But, still, I thought I'd stay here for awhile, you know, finish my book (liar, liar, pants on fire). And I'd hate to move the cat now, and all," she ended limply.

"Oh come on, Mom, the cat? We'll bring the damn cat. Last year it was the birds. Remember? Here it was fifty degrees in this shack and you couldn't leave because the birds would die if you didn't keep filling the feeders. Remember? Honest to God, Mom, birds, cats, babies, are they all the same to you?" Justin's face was dark and pressing.

Martha sighed, acknowledging his point. "No, of course not. It's just that, you know," and here Martha spoke more truthfully than was her wont with Justin, "You know, there is

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nothing so despised on earth as pregnant cats and middle-aged women. I just think we should stick together, that's all." She tried a smile.

"Mom," Justin's voice was full of compassion hovering just above annoyance, "That's a crock. You're not despised, you're wanted. We really want you, Judith and I. And the baby, think how the baby will want you."

The baby, a baby with a mother in a law firm, a baby with no one to cherish and preserve in memory all the days of its small and singular life. Martha's eyes betrayed her again, but she tried to rally. "Justin, I just don't know. I'm happy here, you know."

Justin stood up, clearly hurt. "Judith and I are happy too. We just thought that maybe we could all be happy together. I respect your work, but I just can't believe you have to be all alone in some godforsaken place to do it."

Her work. Martha had no reply, nothing at all to answer her son.

Justin bent, then, and kissed the top of her head. "I'll call soon. You think about it, O.K.?"

Martha, looking at her magnificent magenta floor, asked, "Give me a month, all right? One month to decide." She felt Justin's smile, and knew he was quite sure of her now.

"Sure, Mom, a month is fine. The baby's not due until after Christmas anyway." He laughed and said shyly, "We'd like you to help us with names—with your imagination I know you'll come up with something great."

When he left, he walked with the long strides of his father in the past and his child in the future. He carries it all within him, Martha thought, watching through a cracked pane. She was hardly necessary to all that now, was she?

In about a month, Martha thought, the corn would be chopped and the leaves gone from the trees. She hadn't yet begun to feed the birds.

Deep in the night, the cat gave birth. Martha awoke to a pained mewing and arose to watch as the cat labored in the box. She shivered in her flannel nightgown beside the small drama and watched each kitten arrive, wet and smelling deeply of blood and birth. There were eventually four, all the same undistinguished grey as their mother. They mewled about,

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then found the cat's nipples and gave suck, strong and healthy. The cat purred and licked.

Martha finally found the courage to dislodge one of the tiny beasts from its mother's breast, and she held it against her cheek, breathing in its odor of life. It struggled and cried, and alarm sprang into the cat's yellow eyes, so Martha returned it, safe, to the soft nest of Justin's baby blankets.

> Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been?
> I've been to London. I've been a queen.
> Pussy cat, pussy cat, that is not true.
> I've been a queen, I say. Have you?

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SHELBY STEPHENSON

I Feel the Grief of Growing Up

Is it the way the light falls on the porch, the feeling
I get when I see the weeds bend along the side of the car
when someone died and I did not understand,
something that still means too much and nothing?
The search for myself is
fragile as the least appearance of where I have been.
In the middle room a bed sways and my back fits the soft
curve.
Snow turns the afternoon to snow
shaking fragments over the earth.
Frozen camellias hang out of symmetry.
Leaves cluster on a maple,
lose hold and hold to nothing
so nearly snow the willing tree sparrows
flock and stand in slow puddles.
I feel an early evening coming on,
the smell of my favorite pillow.
I rub my eyes with forefinger and thumb,
feel the trembling heat that floats in summer,
grapes in my sticky palms where the scuppernong vine
runs the fence-row to the end of the five-acre field
when tobacco's all barned except for the tips
and corn is hard on the cob.
Boards creak,
the hound scratching fleas.
Pigs squeal over slops next to the graveyard,
swift feet counting life at mid-heart.
I want to break like a goat for space!
At home I am a stranger.
All I write is in vain,
no more than the frog on the back road—
that much!

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JEAN BURDEN

Connection

for Hildegarde Flanner

We are talking of Hopkins and Joyce,
of cicadas and tree
frogs. You from your hilltop
500 miles away explain
in your delicately explicit way
the difference in their night speech.
I stretch languidly between
the sleeping cats and smile
at the faint indignation in your voice.
"Anyone can hear it," you say.
"All one has to do is listen."
Then suddenly we hear a sound—
not kin to frog or insect—a squeak,
a whisper, a lilliputian squawk.
"What was that?" you ask, alarmed—
you who once bashed two rattlesnakes to death
in less than a minute,
and thought it no great feat.
"Probably only a snide comment from
some faulty silicon chip," I say—
I the expert, who knows so much about such things.
"Or the CIA?" I venture, warming up,
thinking of le Carré and all those other spooks.
"They don't tap poets' phones," you say severely,
though anyone can tell you're not quite sure.
Crackle, squeak, chirrup, snap.
We lose a word. It could have been important.
Is there between two people, no matter
how connected, always a third?
There is no time to wonder.
"Are you there?" you ask. "Can you hear me?"
And back across the fragile line,
speech thinned to a hiss,
comes the stranger's answer: *Yes,*
oh yes, oh yes.

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CARL LITTLE

A Reminder

Great Cranberry Island, Maine
for William Kienbusch, 1914-1980

It is one sort of evidence of living:
a wash hung in the yard
between the house and a tree or some such
arrangement for holding things
off the ground. Sheets snap like sails,
a bra trails a strap, its
guard let down. An only shirt (tropical
fish pattern) flutters about
till its arms entangle or go limp for
want of wind. What's dry

gets taken in before the dusk dampens it,
the vacation over so to speak.
Once more a faded yellow towel will fold
neatly in three or someone's
favorite pants be remended. Crisp linen
may twist beneath lovers
excited to old desires by the freshness
upon which they lie.
And as one supposes every household has

its weakness, so each home
the length of this island has a wash.
But of certain things
one must be, from time to time, reminded:
happiness, for instance,
mortality, and even (and this is my argument)
that wide assortment
of odd clothing that droops in the dark,
forgotten tonight, haunting
the house to which we are all attached
by a good strong cord.

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LUISA VALENZUELA

Urban Haiku

In the dark of night
a square moon:
it is your window.

(Untitled)

One day you buy something new
and the formerly useless
is useable.
Accumulation.
Things left lying in a drawer,
forgotten,
with some addition
take on new life.

Memories?
Maybe some day dead memories
Will grow green again
in the light of a moment's moment.

[*Translated from the Spanish by Margaret Sayers Peden*]

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LOUIS SIMPSON

Disorder and Escape in the Fiction of V. S. Naipaul

> To be born on an island like Isabella . . . was to be born to disorder.
> —*The Mimic Men*

The greater part of the fiction of V. S. Naipaul is set in the newly independent states of Africa and the Caribbean, and the view is pessimistic: the natives have taken the government into their own hands but are unable to establish order. As Robert Boyers has observed, "Naipaul is our primary novelist of disorder and breakdown."[1]

But though the novels offer controversial views of life in the new states this is not why they are compelling. In art it is the mind of the artist that makes the difference, his own interest in the work he is creating. Boyers remarks that Naipaul "seems more interested in a spiritual or psychological state than in the machinery of action," and I would add that the spiritual or psychological state he is most interested in is his own.

As a child Vidyadha Naipaul grew up in a big house in Chaguanas, a community of East Indians whose forebears had immigrated to Trinidad as indentured laborers. They perpetuated Indian rituals and marriage customs, and had little contact with the world outside—with the Negroes, for example.[2] But Vidyadha's father, Seepersad Naipaul, was different—he was a writer of newspaper articles. And he was exceedingly troubled—he did not get along with his wife's family. His son tells us that these in-laws were a "totalitarian organization. Decisions—about politics, about religious matters, and, most important, about other families—were taken

[1] Robert Boyers, "V. S. Naipaul," in *The American Scholar*, Summer 1981, pp. 118, 366.

[2] Morton Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad: A Study of Cultural Persistence* (New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1961).

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to a closed circle at the top—my grandmother and her two eldest sons-in-law."[3]

The recurring theme of Naipaul's fiction, the need to escape from a "totalitarian" environment, was the obsession of his father, and of course Naipaul has shown it to be so in *A House for Mr. Biswas.* For house read a separate life.

Seepersad Naipaul challenged Hindu beliefs and superstitions. He informed his readers that native farmers were practicing rites of Kali in order to cure their diseased cattle. Thereupon he received an anonymous letter in Hindi warning him that he would develop poisoning, "die on Sunday and be buried on Monday," unless he offered the sacrifice of a goat to Kali. He made the sacrifice. This, his son observes, was a great humiliation. "It had occurred just when my father was winning through to a kind of independence."

When Vidyadha was six his father moved his family into Port of Spain. This was "in the nature of a migration from the Hindu and Indian countryside to the white-Negro-mulatto town." The child was delighted with the sights and sounds and characters—men like Bogart, who had shaken off Hindu family conventions and taken a new name from the movies.

But Seepersad Naipaul's bid for independence was aborted. His mother-in-law bought a cocoa estate in the hills to the northwest of Port of Spain, and "it was decided—by the people in the family who decided on such matters—that the whole family . . . should move there." So the freedoms of the town were suspended and made way again for family quarrels.

After two years of this Seepersad Naipaul moved his family back to Port of Spain where he managed to have a job with the government. But they were living crowded into rooms and the street was changing. There was an American military base at the end of the street—one of the houses or yards had become a brothel. "Disorder within," says the novelist, "disorder without. Only my school life was ordered; anything that had happened there I could date at once. But my family life—my life at home or my life in the house, in the street—was jumbled, without sequence."

[3] V. S. Naipaul, "Prologue to an Autobiography," in *Vanity Fair,* Vol. 46, No. 2, April 1983, passim.

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There must have been much in the street to appall him. He had been brought up by people who were scrupulously clean and who disapproved strongly of sexual relations with non-Hindus. The characters in Naipaul's fiction echo these attitudes. In *The Mimic Men* Singh tells how as a boy he used a girl's toothbrush by mistake—"I felt," he says, "dreadfully unclean." In *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul remembers that once in a science class he would not suck on a length of tube that had been touched by other mouths, and another Indian boy in the class remarked approvingly, "Real brahmin." As for habits that are obviously unsanitary, such as defecating in the streets, Naipaul's revulsion is memorable. Everything else he has to say about life in India pales in comparison with the strength of his feelings on this subject.

One can imagine the mingled fear and fascination of the young Hindu when confronted with the sexual disorder of Port of Spain, the "brothel ground" at the end of the street.

"Only my school life was ordered." The school was Queen's Royal College, which appears in *The Mimic Men* as Isabella Imperial. The headmaster was an Englishman; the curriculum would have been that of a public school in England. Discipline would have been firm, with "lines" for lesser derelictions and caning for more serious offenses.

A colonial education such as this offered a good deal of security. In Naipaul's *Guerrillas* the writer Roche says that he is not usually afraid, and attributes this to his having been educated at a British school. "It's the way I am. It probably has to do with the school I went to. I suppose if you accept authority and believe in the rules, you aren't afraid of any particular individual."

Queen's Royal College offered Naipaul a refuge from the disorder at home and in the streets. And his education taught him the value of order. If he was like other young men and women who were educated in the colonies, he came to think that the Mother Country was the pattern of a good society. And it would follow that other places were inferior. The more he studied English history and literature, the more he would feel that the culture of the Caribbean—if it could be called a culture at all—was inferior. Such was the inevitable result of an education in a British colony. England was the real world to which colonials might aspire, but they could

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never hope to be included. The history of the West Indies was not real history, the English they spoke was not as correct as that spoken in England. The grass was greener in Sussex and the birds sang more sweetly.

Naipaul traveled to England on a government scholarship and studied at Oxford. The descriptions of the immigrant's life in *The Mimic Men* show how disillusioning that life could be. Nothing would have prepared the West Indian for the English climate or the dreariness of living in a boarding house. Confronted with greasy wallpaper and a gas meter into which you had to feed shillings to keep warm, he would have had long thoughts.

Outside you were overwhelmed by the monuments and public buildings that seemed to be saying that you had no part in the centuries. It takes more than a public school education to make you English—you have to have been born in England.

Some of the immigrants, in order to keep their self-respect, withdrew from the life around them. The narrator of *A Bend in the River* observes: "Indar had said about people like me that when we came to a great city we closed our eyes; we were concerned only to show that we were not amazed."

At this point Naipaul became a writer. Going to Queen's Royal College was his first escape from disorder—writing was his second. Ever since he was a child he had wanted to be a writer like his father, who wrote articles for the *Trinidad Guardian* about "village feuds, family vendettas, murders, bitter election battles." He wrote about strange characters such as a Negro hermit who had once been rich and pleasure-seeking but now lived alone with a dog in a hut in the swamplands. "I read the stories as stories," Naipaul remarks—a hint, perhaps, to those who would read his own fiction as something else.[4]

Naipaul's first novels, *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira*, are about people and events such as his father described. The Mystic Masseur was not far-fetched: there was a Camār from Janglī Tolā—that is, an East Indian of lower caste—who "set himself up as a Brahmin pundit." In writing about the Mystic Masseur, also, Naipaul was reenacting his own escape by way of an education. "This reading," says one

[4] V. S. Naipaul, op cit, p. 138.

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of the characters in *The Mystic Masseur*, "is a great great thing."

Naipaul's *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion*, which might have been written by J. B. Priestley—it seems like an exercise in writing a perfectly English novel in order to prove that he could do it—has one lively passage in which Mr. Stone discovers the joy of writing. This it is that gives meaning to his existence—he is never so happy again as when composing the plan for the Knights Companion. "He wrote, he corrected, he re-wrote; and fatigue never came to him." Afterwards "He felt exhausted, sad and empty."

This was how it felt to escape from life into writing. And the following sentences about Mr. Stone's writing strike me as Naipaul's own thoughts about the art he practices: "The only pure moments, the only true moments were those he had spent in the study, writing out of a feeling whose depths he realized only as he wrote." Then Naipaul observes: "What he had written was a faint and artificial rendering of that emotion, and the scheme as the Unit had practiced it was but a shadow of that shadow. All passion had disappeared. . . . All action, all creation was a betrayal of feeling and truth."

But unlike other writers without a cause, Naipaul does not make a religion of his art. Eugene Goodheart surmises that Naipaul would scorn "the Flaubertian dream of a perfect work of art, which is all form and no content."[5] I would put it another way: while Naipaul appears to find the act of writing completely satisfying, he is not attached to the results.

Naipaul has told how he hit on a subject. He had left Oxford and was working for the BBC Caribbean service in London, presenting a weekly literary program for the Caribbean. One day when he was sitting in the dimly lighted "freelances' room" his thoughts reverted to Port of Spain and he typed the sentence: "Every morning when he got up Hat would sit on the banister of his back verandah and shout across, 'What happening there, Bogart?' " The story thus begun led to other stories. *Miguel Street* was written quickly.[6] He was putting a part of his life behind him, an area of darkness.

This is what gives Naipaul's fiction its compelling power. He is always putting darkness behind him. As he has made

[5] Eugene Goodheart, "Naipaul and the Voices of Negation," in *Salmagundi*, No. 54, Fall 1981, p. 56.

[6] V. S. Naipaul, op cit, pp. 54-58.

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his escape from disorder, first through his education, then through writing, in his novels and stories people struggle to escape. Sometimes they do escape and sometimes they don't. In the novel titled *In a Free State* the Africans have taken over from the white people. Bobby and Linda, who are white, are driving toward the safety of the European compound. "Somewhere up there," says Linda, "they've taken off their nice new clothes and they're dancing naked and holding hands and eating dung." Bobby and Linda meet up with a group of native soldiers who humiliate and beat the white man, but they manage to reach the compound. In *Guerrillas* the woman Jane becomes involved sexually with the leader of the guerrillas—that is, they call themselves guerrillas, but the writer Roche calls them a gang. Jane is leaving the island, but she makes a detour to say goodbye to her lover and is murdered. Her annihilation is total—her body will never be found.

The narrator of *A Bend in the River* manages to escape from the new state, but many do not. As the steamer travels into the sunset he sees dugouts full of people who are desperately trying to tie up to the steamer. "They were in flight from the riverbanks. They jammed and jostled against the sides of the steamer and the barge, and many were swamped. Water hyacinths pushed up in the narrow space between the steamer and the barge. We went on. Darkness fell."

The plot I have described is that of a nightmare. As Nazruddin says in *A Bend in the River*, "You can always get into those places. What is hard is to get out." He makes the further observation: "That is a private fight. Everybody has to find his own way." Naipaul has found his own way—the characters in his fiction sometimes do not. In any case, we share their anxiety, the pressure to escape. We hurry to the end of a novel by Naipaul as we hurry to the end of a nightmare. Anything, even confrontation with the worst, is better than being in suspense.

We are between two worlds, the old order that has ended, the new order that has not begun. Naipaul is the novelist of the state in between—a state that is psychological as well as political. I have tried to describe the psychology because I think it more likely to last.

The characters in Naipaul's fiction may be planning for a

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future state, but the writer is not to be identified with his characters. He resists absorption by any place or nation. In *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul speaks of an Indian "philosophy of despair, leading to passivity, detachment, acceptance. It is only now," he remarks, "as the impatience of the observer is dissipated in the processes of writing and self-inquiry, that I see how much this philosophy had also been mine. It had enabled me through the stresses of a long residence in England, to withdraw completely from nationality and loyalties except to persons; it had made me content to be myself alone, my work, my name (the last two so different from the first); it had convinced me that every man was an island, and taught me to shield all that I knew to be good and pure within myself from the corruption of causes."

The protagonist in a novel by Naipaul is escaping but does not hope to arrive—he knows there is no great, good place. I am reminded of the writing of another novelist, Joseph Conrad. Conrad grew up in Poland under Russian occupation; his father was enlisted in the hopeless cause of revolution. G. Jean-Aubrey says of Conrad in his early years, "Unconsciously he was being trained in a secret and inflexible fidelity to ideals disassociated from hope."[7] The same might be said of Naipaul. In his writing there is a conflict between intellectual curiosity, a first-rate reporter's interest in the way people live, and a tremendous passivity, a conviction of the futility of intelligence . . . its weakness when confronted with brute force.

Like Conrad, Naipaul has chosen to live in England where people leave you alone and you need have no loyalty except to persons. In this neutral environment he is able to write novels that reenact his escape from disorder and his father's struggle to escape. The novels tell us how corrupt and violent life can be, and that it is necessary to fly from others in order to preserve all that is "good and pure" within oneself.

Flowers and weeds cling to the boat, and a thousand hands reach out to hold it back.

[7] G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters* (Doubleday, Page and Company, Garden City, New York, 1927) p. 13.

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LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

Dominoes and Politics on the Morne

Morne Fortuné, Castries, St. Lucia

Your Downisland Legend
precedes you in my travel Almanac. In Barbados,
tops in your college class—one month before graduation, you quit!
For three years, a dropout: *ideals*
must not be compromised. And no one
could guess what task or ceremony blocked your finish,
so close to a degree . . . Apartments
and bungalows seem honeycombed,
randomly, in all shelves, ledges and overhangs of Morne Fortuné
(the mountain rising directly behind Castries'
town square): the odd

displacement of house
lots defies zone or subdivision layout, portions
of military quarters exhumed from a hundred years disuse . . . *Midday.*
Sunny. Blazing glare flashed
from corrugated zinc or tin rooftops—
blinding me to a halt at every turn of the tangly uphill
road: tar wet and sticky: a two way
single lane blacktop which ties
knots or loops in itself so quickly, some higher bends in the road
seem to undercut, or tunnel below, the curves
we left behind. "Turn

here," you say. We drop
into a burrow—I slam the brakes to a stillstand,
three feet from the road: private drive and car port (one car limit!)
serving eight or nine homes stacked
one upon another, slantwise,
like a ten-story cliff pagoda carved into the mountainside,
the row of vague roof-gutter
projections the only visible proof
of demarcations between overhead levels. The old military barracks
and canteen were slid into natural indentations
in the hillslopes: hide-

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away, camouflage to fool
enemy ships at sea—just entering the harbor mouth.
But why do modern contractors and architects keep up this buried facade?
Homes, not military trenches
or dugouts—"Foxholes!" I think,
as we step down the ramp into a low basement cottage, all light
blocked out by heavy shutters. I
am sightless, for a full minute,
perhaps. Hear the oscillations of rockers beneath a chair in the corner.
Heavy breathing in tempo with to-and-fro creaks
of the rocker. Grandfather,

is it? Or Great-great . . . I'm
greeted by sodden handshake. *Gnarled damp roots,*
knobby, cold, rotted in spots, dug up fresh from loose soil. But I drop
the limp claw of putty, and steal
past the makeshift partition—
a halfdrawn curtain suspended from the ceiling on a flexible
wooden rod—into an alcove (the "bahk
room"), where your young wife nurses
a days-old wrinkled, hairless monkey with human ears. I greet numerous
other family members, spanning four generations:
seated; standing on one leg,

storklike; leaning upon wall,
or door jamb, I taking no more than two steps
between kin, and we're thrust out the door into blinding sun. My eyes
still hadn't adjusted to the indoors
dimmed light, no one face grown
detailed enough to grasp, or remember . . . Now we're circling
higher and higher, en route to *Top*
of the Morne, above all dwellings—
a panoramic view of nearby islands, then lunch at the famed native Inn,
public lodge revered for its ethnic cuisine:
melting pot and nerve

center, where island
dignitaries, artists, and common laborers sup
side-by-side, rub shoulders. And even as we pass through the portico
(men and boys seated at the domino
tables), you hobnob with a uniformed
V.I.P., tall and elegant: his open-throated khaki jacket,
oddly formal, styled after Castro's
dishabille manner, but sporty—
not militiaman—attire (no stiff cloth bars on the shoulder, or breast
decorations, but the sinister aroma of gunpowder
musk is in our breaths) . . .

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Two-minute convivialities.
Intros. Poet to Poet to Deputy Prime Minister,
the first word of the lofty title spoken ten decibels softer. Degrees,
honors, from Oxford and Bristol,
are sprinkled like condiments
in the comic salad of our brief doorway repartee—our air
of breakneck comings and goings,
feigned laxity, feigned ease. Upright,
we hover, as at attention. Waved good-byes, leaden, flicker between us,
while we part company. Two seconds out of earshot,
your voice much subdued,

"*He's to be sworn in*—
advanced to Prime Minister—within a Fortnight!
Were I *your* guest, in Illinois, small chance I'd ever meet Veep Mondale
in a local snackshop, or bistro."
I nod my assent . . . The expatriate
poet, diplomaless, was lauded at his homecoming—a hero's
welcome. His Island patrimony
is status: known to a few seated,
not to others, *all* sense a nimbus of starlight, moondust, he inhabits . . .
We linger, waiting to be seated by an absentee
host—happily surrounded

by seven gaming tables.
Dominoes! At one end of the screened gallery,
a child of six is locked in a dead heat with a man four generations
his senior. With each slow move
of the white-eyed black tablets,
the barrier of decades, or social strata, between players
melts away. Skill at the tables
breeds a high pitch of listening,
which seems to infuse the room's smoke-billowy updrafts with an aura
of quiet brooding . . . A slender winged bulb (*A Dali
ear*?) steaks from table

to table, pauses *in air*,
its wings a blue shimmery blur. We know it hears
all the gaming voices, and it sights the white domino-eyes wink news
of wins, news of losses. It winks
back, jerks toward the ceiling
as if yanked upwards by a window-shade spring, then stops
on a dime of light just below
the one bare electric bulb—stalls
in place for slow whirred seconds: its purple pate glisters, lustrous
in the glare. Now it zooms a diagonal descent
to chair-back four tables

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distant, hovers as if set
to alight on this empty chair between two fidgety
mustachioed opponents, but zips down to the adjacent chair's lower rung
between ankles. A two-second landing!
Next, it drifts under the table
and emerges betwixt the knees of one who rises from his seat
in a victory shout . . . Suddenly, I
notice you're tracing the hummingbird's
last moves for me with your finger, pointing and orchestrating his swerves:
"Oh how he thrives on the smoke-filled effluvium
of the domino tables, swings

their luck one way today,
tomorrow the other; so tame, he flies bull's-eyes
through the oldest man's cigar smoke hoops." "Just so, I've seen hummers
before," I say, "in California. But never
a family-tamed homing pigeon: Good Luck
augurer and household pet into the bargain, who sips water
from a saucer, and takes his daily specks
of seed from the candlestick-cup bird
feeder." No one tries to catch—or cage!—him. And we don't *see* him fly
from place to place. He disappears in a streak,
blue-tinged column flashed

on the air. Reappears—above,
below, in the next room. A firefly's quick-change
nerve pulse, wedded to the dragonfly's long delicate transparent wings:
I would like to cup my hands around
his peacock-shiny varicolored head,
but I am left scooping pockets of vacant space, hollows . . .
We're seated in the innermost atrium,
one of three round tables arranged
in a triangle: speech dialects, buzzing in the air overhead, crisscross
and mingle in our ears. We discern French patois
larded with African slang

and colloquialisms. Native
food we order, likewise, is hybrid French creole
cuisine garnished with Afro-herbs and spices: baked fillet of grouper
thickly sopped in tomato and onion
marinade; white yam slices, yellow
breadfruit wedges (pineapple shapes, but soft-textured mush
like boiled potatoes)—all dishes
medium priced . . . No meat heavier
than fish or chicken, the anodyne of health foods and the purer mind
flows in our talk: food of the higher thought,
food for the Soul's fast . . .

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* * *

Do I know *Rastas*, you ask?
"The *Ganja* pushers?" I reply. "*Dreadlocks* and double
bounce in their walks: men like souped-up hotrods with heavy-duty shocks,
wide tires, and upraised rears?"
"No! Streetcorner hopheads. They give
the true *roots* movement a bad name. A whole body of symbol
and image poetry in our style of walk,
dress, speech, breathing, music
and dance. It is rhythm. It is tempo. It is faith hatched in the rumble,
or rattle, of Marley's Reggae chants—his sounds
our cue! They dredge up

Rebel Soul to fight
the oppressor. He's the Carib Bob Dylan, summons
the roots passion of the common folk to rise up against dictators, Juntas—
in all fledgling Carib nations. Black
politics. Black theology. Black roots
economics. A mind passion sweeping the West Indies, and beyond,
a worldwide Black mind esthetic spread
on the limitless wings of Reggae songs,
Reggae dance." "Less Bob Dylan to me," I say, "than the Soul's Gorilla-cry,
brute grumble, gains wrung from *Dread* contained,
and primitive Gut-shrieks

of the early Stones' songs,
or today's Punk Rock nose-thumbings at conventions
in dress, gesture, and speech." "Yes and no," you snarl. "It's a question
of history. Public Record. Rasta born
in Jamaica in the thirties, two full
generations before Rock. In the seventies, it spread to Carib
newly-founded free nations, *Dread*
a Godchild of the demise of colonial
empires." "But Sparrow and Calypsonians still command a following, yes?"
"Ah! Calypso, songs of woman and sex and carnival,
ran its course from the mid-

fifties to the mid-sixties.
Now my father and his cronies still get their kicks,
in secret, from those decadent vaudeville jesters. Reggae's serious man's
Credo. The new wave of artist-exiles,
degrees or career diplomas earned,
come home to rebuild this Island . . . " Poems, prose vignettes
and political broadsides are spread
on the tabletop, one poem's corners
smudged with creole tomato sauce. A color proper to those vituperative
and stormy propaganda leaflets, we agree—our rare
moment of smiling Oneness.

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Queen of the Billiards

On the first eve of Carnival, night of the Queen
contest, I dine on the hostel
terrace overlooking Castries' Harbor.
The hostess, much
senior to the teenage waitresses,
mid-twenties, say (svelte
in lustrous black taffeta dress; short cape
with lace trim), takes elegant slow steps, escorting me
to the premiere Harbor View
two seat table. Then she sidles
out the back door, nods to the hidden bar hostess, drops off
her high heels and—in one long stride—scoops
a pair of slippers with upcurled toes. She shuffles

across a hardwood floor to join a tense parlor game
in progress in the smoke-filled
back room, she the absentee participant
whose next shot
is so nervously awaited—
the expectant hush
draws me to the rear exit. Unobserved,
poised behind the decorative carved door jamb, I peer
at a fast-moving game
of billiards. Three agile men compete
with the black-gowned hostess, her moves with a cue stick
swift, exact, wholly free of excess.
The electric snap of her delicate thin wrists,

her eel-like slender black arms, crisp pop of the cue
and click of ball upon ball—
all bespeak a style near flawless. Two men,
distant friends
to the proprietary couple
(manager, chief hostess),
dressed in knockabout leisure suits,
tease and snicker, warmly, between her virtuoso
shots. Her calls, delivered
in sharp creole patois ("seeks bawl
in de syd pahk't, Mon"), elicit fond jeers—so relaxed,
they forgive her for winning. Their eyes
applaud her talent! But the manager, in *Dreadlocks*

hairdo, three-piece suit and suspenders, who is
courting her and hates to lose
(failed wooer, too, I'd hazard), casts zigzag
finger shadows
across the aimed trajectory
of her next slow shot.
When the chicanery of finger

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puppets flops, her lucky streak unchecked, he performs
hexy hand-hoops, fists and Vs
over the ball, circling the chalked tip
of her cue stick in motion (waist-bent, he shakes the broad
table with his reach), chanting voodoo
curses and bugaboos . . . She frowns, but tolerates

his worst pranks. They are his *Reggae* prerogative.
At last, she misses a routine
flick shot. He snatches the cue from her, lines up
his ricochet
side-cushion poke with great flourish:
Rastafarian who stalks
prize game, and he executes
his combinations with princely attack, palms thumping
the velvet table top—a drum beat . . .
He whoops a cry of triumph, two classic Ace
shots in a row! Then, murderous quiet bathes the gnat-thick
hall. Individual dust motes divebomb
the table like a storm of asteroids, meteorites . . .

Handslips, in mid-shot. The long tapered rod squirms,
jiggles in his grip, and the ball
flies askew. Leaps the hurdle of side cushion. Cracks
glass panelling
in the antique double doors. "Scratch,"
she murmurs; while he,
in fury, swings the cue back and forth
like a cracked whip, rips the felt cover from end to table
end, exposing the unfinished
wood—flesh pink—beneath the gash. "Foul play.
You jumped!", he threatens her. Now both men restrain his arms,
while—the cue stick smashed across his knee—
he waves wood icicle spears, Zululike, with each hand . . . .

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VERNON YOUNG

Other Countries

When, in 1946, Malcolm Lowry received from Jonathan Cape's reader a list of suggestions for revising his submitted novel, *Under the Volcano* (which he had rewritten four times since 1936), he sent an answering essay—you can hardly call it a letter—to correct the reader's ignorance of the manifold layers his fiction comprised. It must be the unique document in the history of author-publisher correspondence, running to thirty-one pages in the *Selected Letters* (Lippincott, 1965), roughly 12,000 words! Nothing explicit in Lowry's novel, it turns out, has any importance in itself; it serves only to symbolize or to coerce allegories from every source in the world's literature and religions which at the moment Lowry could conjure. Jonathan Cape, to whom the missive was addressed, must have wondered why the author had bothered to specify the Cuernavaca setting in such detail if it was only a surrogate for the unrevealed.

Mexico, in Lowry's words, is "the meeting place, according to some, of mankind itself"—whatever that means, and who are the some?—"the age-old arena of racial and political conflicts of every nature." Can't it be said of any place that it's an age-old arena, if that's your found subject? "The allegory is that of the Garden of Eden, the Garden representing the world, from which we ourselves run perhaps slightly more danger of being ejected than when I wrote the book." If "the world" normally represents our banishment from the Garden, how can Eden and the world be identical with one another? Further, "the book was planned as a kind of Inferno"—simultaneously with being planned as an allegory of Eden?—and "the drunkenness of the Consul is used on one plane to symbolize the universal drunkenness of mankind during the war, or during the period immediately preceding it, which is almost the same thing." The hell it is!

Am I being gratuitous if I insist that there is no pertinent relationship between an alcoholic consul going down the drain in Mexico and the failure of nerve which in Europe enabled Hitler to bring war to most of the known earth? The statesmen of France and England, notably, were not drunk; they were petrified. And that during the war, "mankind" was not drunk; it was fighting for its existence? "The novel then," Lowry goes on, "is concerned principally, in Edmund Wilson's words [speaking of Gogol], with the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself." Which doesn't rhyme with his conception of the novel as depicting a Manichean

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battleground of "racial and political conflicts." Whenever Lowry encountered, in someone else's critiques, a definition that challenged him, he tried at once to bring his own work into line with it. Wilson on Gogol, and whom on *The Brothers Karamazov* or *Nostromo* or *The Magic Mountain*, to say nothing of *Ulysses*?

"On the surface, Hugh and Yvonne are simply searching for the Consul, but such a search would have an added meaning to anyone who knows anything of the Eleusinian mysteries." (*Yes*, that was on the tip of my tongue!) A mind as nervously obsessed with presentiments and echoes as Lowry's was not surprisingly contaminated by numbers. His twelve chapters represent "a universal unit": twelve hours in the day, twelve months in the year, the twelve labors of Hercules and "the clock slowly striking midnight for Faust." But the deepest layers of the novel attach themselves "to myth, like the Jewish Cabbala where twelve is of the highest symbolic importance." It seems a pity that there were only ten commandments.

Jonathan Cape was apparently so intimidated by these inexhaustible cross-references that he published the book! Among those who reviewed it for ranking periodicals, Jacques Barzun was one of the firm few who were not impressed favorably. He pronounced the novel "derivative and pretentious" adding that "it could be recommended only as an anthology held together with earnestness." Whereupon Lowry sent him a 2,000-word letter in the spirit of the above, to set him straight.

The samples I have here quoted of Lowry's demented "earnestness," which, believe me, are duplicated in kind for those thirty-one pages I cited, may help to explain why the book has never before reached the screen and why John Huston's version is an improvement in some ways, yet mainly a futile effort. Whatever you do with the novel, it remains a monologue by Consul Fermin, compulsively thirsty, if articulate, a self-infatuated souse who doesn't *want* to know why he prefers stupefaction to consciousness. Huston, who is not interested in triple meanings, saw the raw bones of the situation and believed he could film the story by observing its primary action from the outside. Guy Gallo did his best to supply a script that would simplify the original while being faithful to its intention, over the nature of which I can't believe he and Huston didn't have argument.

As a result, unanswered questions haunt the screenplay; they had seldom been settled by Lowry himself. How seriously are we supposed to take Firmin's conviction that he was responsible for the death of a submarine commander? How sympathetically are we to take his tormented love of the departed Yvonne, since when she returns he can't for five minutes renounce a single drink and is visibly more anxious to keep Hugh around than he is her? (Is this where the dog lies buried?) How much of an ass is Hugh with his Savile Row jacket, his Santa Fe belt, his prowess at bullfighting and

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his tepid regrets for not having helped the Spanish Loyalists to lose their civil war? A transposed ambiguity can sometimes become a commendable subtlety. The original story is a reminiscence by Laruelle (who had had an affair with Yvonne) a year later than the events which took place on the Day of the Dead in 1938. There is no Laruelle in the film; instead, Gallo has planted the inference, or more likely an invention of the Consul, that Hugh and Yvonne had been lovers. This irresolution was adroitly handled, and nicely acted by Anthony Andrews and Jacqueline Bisset.

What I missed, all told, was the Huston veracity of milieu. We were in Mexico, yet were we? It's possible that Huston's shooting schedule was so uptight that he paid full attention only to Albert Finney. The Mexican actors were no end self-conscious and all that Day of the Dead stuff seemed to me overpopulated with supernumeraries nudging each other into camera range. As for Popocatepetl, I have never thought that a volcano was a very subtle correlative for impending social doom. If you want it to be, you should at least find a *smoking* volcano!

Albert Finney was, of course, overwhelming, as he perished in his spurious pride, so successfully close to the real exasperating thing that my reception of his performance was without compassion or delight. Alcoholics on the grand scale are repugnant to me. I've nursed too many of them and had them spit in my face for all reward. As crowning euphemism for his quasi-tragic hero, the author maintained that "William James, if not Freud" would have agreed with him that "the agonies of the drunkard find their most accurate poetic analogue in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers." I can't answer for William James but I'm convinced that Sigmund Freud would have never agreed with one damned word this outrageous man had to say!

Lowry, as one way of getting himself off the hook, found divinity hedging the alcoholic. In his play, *Another Country*, for which he also wrote the movie scenario, Julian Mitchell, with even greater alacrity, sees the homosexual adorned with a halo. The shaky moral premise on which his play-and-film are based is that the traitor, Guy Burgess (Guy Bennett on screen), became a spy for the Soviet Union out of revenge for having been discriminated against as a homosexual in the public school he attended. By manufacturing his evidence from life-like material, Mitchell makes out a good case so long as you know nothing of the career of Burgess and little about life at Eton or Oxford or their like, at the time.

That English society in 1930 was an interlocking garrison in which ethnic and sexual hypocrisies were egregious, there is no disputing. For six hundred years the British public school system may be said to have justified the end to which it was dedicated: to supply the nation and later the Empire with an educated governing elite. It cannot be said to have justified its negating of the polarity between

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men and women by investing the principal male clans with an infusion of emotion that extended the homosexual nuance far beyond the institutions in which it had been monkishly housed. Goronwy Rees (in his chronicle of Guy Burgess as he knew him, *A Chapter of Accidents*, 1972) puts it more mercifully, perhaps, than I have. The products of Oxbridge, he suggests, were still, in the twentieth century,

> . . . as in the Middle Ages, in essence, clerks whose future lay in supplying church and state with the staff required to operate their administrative machines; and in effect they still, as then, subscribed to the rule of celibacy which applied to the medieval clerk. Only that rule no longer derived its authority from the love of God but rather from the kind of love which David had for Jonathan. . . .

The prefects of *Another Country*, fearful of the bad name their house is getting from homosexual scandals, gather incriminating evidence of Guy's personal rendezvous with a classmate, submit him to the standard punishment of a public caning and vote him out of the prefecture for the next year. While such ostracism from the seats of power (no pun intended!) in an Oxbridge setting may well be a serious disability in the offender's career thereafter, that is by no means an invariable consequence. Citizens of gay country are prompt in calling attention, often justifiably, to the prejudice that assails and excludes them; they seldom acknowledge that in given social circumstances the homosexual clique is itself an instrument of insinuative power, silently wielded and impossible to combat. In the particular case of Burgess, which is what *Another Country* is linked to, it must be obvious that he, personally, could not have been conclusively snubbed or he would have never attained the position he had in the Foreign Office decoding service, nor would he have been entrusted with virtually top-drawer secrets of the realm.

Gays do seem tailor-made for espionage, when you add up their usually gregarious way of life, their ostentatious secrecies (inspired less often by their status than by their need for audience—"*I* know something *you* don't know!") and their inquisitive probing of everyone else's spare room (Auden's "there is more than meets the eye"). Yet I know of no statistical support of their prevalence among secret agents. Kim Philby, Burgess's Cambridge friend and tutor, and for some time after the flight of Burgess and Maclean to Moscow, the unrevealed "third man," have not their justification, if that's how Mitchell sees it. Philby was not "bent" and, incidentally, he is a far more interesting case for treatment than the camping Burgess (played in the film with lackluster style by Rupert Everett). So far no one has made much of the fact that Hilary St. John Bridger Philby, Kim's father, was a crucial Arabian explorer and hobnobber

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with sharifs, a convert to Islam who boasted that he was the first Socialist in the Administration services abroad. When on the way to India in 1939 to spread anti-British propaganda, he was arrested and returned to England under the Defence of the Realm Act. Among other heresies, he had loudly announced that Great Britain would lose the war and richly deserved to do so for opposing Hitler, whom he saw as "a mystic, the equal of Christ and Muhammad." Old school tie influences spared him any further chastisement (he was incidentally a cousin of the future Field-Marshal Montgomery)![1] The most striking circumstance that unites Burgess with Philby seems to have been their lifelong reaction to the father figure, one in contempt, the other in a species of emulation!

To sum up: what Mitchell's play-and-film does in effect is to defuse the gravity of high treason by taking one giant step from an implied cause to its aftermath, without including the offense. If, for some, *Another Country* will make treason as well as homosexuality seem more tolerable, for the rest of us it cannot make either country more attractive.

[1] cf. *Travellers in Arabia*, by Robin Bidwell (a Cambridge man) (Hamlyn 1976).

Coming in the Spring 1985 issue of
The Hudson Review:

**New York Intellectuals in the '40s:
Letters by Weldon Kees**

The poet and fiction writer, Weldon Kees, was at the center of the New York literary world in the 1940s. His never-before-published and witty letters describe Edmund Wilson and Mary McCarthy at home . . . a visit with Elizabeth Bishop to see Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital . . . candid glimpses of W. H. Auden, Marianne Moore, Truman Capote, Conrad Aiken and James Agee . . . a visit to the home of William Carlos Williams . . . the doings inside TIME magazine . . . the split-second make up of wartime newsreels.

(Previously announced for this issue)

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Tharporama

PRODIGIOUS AS TWYLA THARP'S TALENT IS, she seems to employ it best when she can skip around from one medium to another. Unlike George Balanchine, she would probably never be satisfied to choreograph for the rest of her life in one company. The difference between the two is that Balanchine cared only about the materials of ballet: steps, design, musical invention, bodies. Tharp cares about that, and more: television, for instance, and sport, and what people are dancing in discotheques. Tharp seems not to be caught up in the abstraction of manipulating a single aesthetic ideal, but is prompted into devising one to fit each new set of circumstances she meets. Her three latest ballets are totally different from one another—and from all the earlier ballets that were on view during the summer.

In addition to the pieces she'd already done for Ballet Theater (*Sinatra Suite*, *The Little Ballet* and *Push Comes to Shove*), there was the new *Bach Partita. Brahms/Handel*, which she co-choreographed with Jerome Robbins, was the hit of the New York City Ballet's spring season. John Curry was doing *After All*, the ice-dancing piece she made for him a few years ago, and Tharp's own company played a two-week season at the Gershwin Theater with a repertory consisting of *Nine Sinatra Songs* and *Fait Accompli*. Intrepid Tharpophiles could complete this extraordinary record by traveling to North Carolina, where she premiered a new work for her company, *Sorrow Floats*, at the American Dance Festival.

Bach Partita (#2 in D Minor) is the biggest of the lot, maybe the biggest dance Tharp has ever made, with 36 dancers—and the most classical. In the middle of my first look at it, I asked a European visitor what it reminded him of: he immediately responded with the same thing that was in my mind: *Concerto Barocco*. Both ballets are to Bach, of course, but the *Partita* really looks nothing like Balanchine's 1941 signature piece. One is expansive, inventive and showy; the other is intimate, romantic, a closed and close society of women, where the lone male is lovingly admitted because he can bring a different dimension to their play. In Tharp's Bach, the unaccompanied violin seems to invoke spectacle; what happens on the stage is a manifold amplification of the music's ideas. In Balanchine's Bach, the chamber orchestra with two solo violins seems to contain the dance, even envelop it, to such an extent that the visual and the aural fuse into a single idea with two exponents. What the two ballets have in common is music as the power supply behind

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every move. That, and the stripped-down clarity that results when no trimming or speculative fuss is allowed to divert our attention from the line of thought.

The *Partita* has three groups of couples, who are deployed in a succession of unusual ways, and a corps of 16 women who enter halfway through the ballet and make a surprisingly fugitive yet impressive appearance. The form of the ballet is unlike any classical ballet known. It has clear divisions, with different forces combined in what begins to seem like an endless assortment of ways. Setups repeat—one principal couple, then another, is backed by four secondary couples—but the patterns are countermanded by something completely different before you can perceive a formula. Then, a long time later, you might see and echo—Cheryl Yaeger and Peter Fonseca appear late in the proceedings with two new couples, and no principals. Even later, one principal pair is backed by the 16 women of the corps. Nothing is predictable, yet everything is drawn from the basic understandings and hierarchies of classicism. According to the program, the ballet has five sections, but I would divide its events into many more, and smaller ones—duets, solos, principals/demi-soloists, solo dancers with corps. These transactions follow one another without breaks or buildups, yet the groupings are always formal, frontal, and precisely designed, and the class distinctions are never violated.

Tharp uses three of the biggest of Ballet Theater's big-gun female stars, Cynthia Gregory, Martine Van Hamel and Magali Messac, and though they're all partnered (I saw Ross Stretton and Fernando Bujones with Gregory at different performances, Clark Tippet with Van Hamel, and Robert La Fosse with Messac), it's these women who seem to make the rest of the ballet happen. Even though the men have a section of their own, it feels like a concession, a reward perhaps for supporting and showing off the women. This doesn't indicate any particular sexist bias on Tharp's part. Both her current ballets to Frank Sinatra, though couple-ballets, draw my attention throughout to the men, not the women. Perhaps Tharp's view of classicism—and I do see the *Bach Partita* as a tribute to ballet's master classicist, Balanchine—is that women are its primary interpreters, while ballroom dancing's principal movers are its men.

In any case, the three principal women in the *Partita* are big, technically invincible, and theatrically authoritative. Tharp pushes them beyond their limits—in fact, I haven't seen Gregory look so interested, so challenged by any role in years. The movement vocabulary, typically Tharpian, has a lot of very fast footwork, off-center body shapes, and small positional or gestural changes. On such a large scale, you'd think this would be hard to see, but in Tharp's choreography timing has acquired enormous importance, and this makes you re-orient yourself to the progress of the action. Her dancers make as much distinction between stopping and going,

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slowing down and speeding up, as conventional dancers make in the placement of the arms. She also puts great stress on whether the dancers are traveling or standing still. So while the audience may not be taking in *what* they're doing in any great detail, we're acutely aware of where and how fast they're doing it and how they got there.

Tharp moves the dancers around the stage so skillfully that, even when they're not dancing in unison, you can see them all. She's economical with her ample resources. I can't remember if all 36 dancers ever got onstage at one time, but the biggest mass effect is achieved when the seven intermediate-rank couples do an adagio in unison. It's like seeing one piece of information, multiplied in the simplest way. Elsewhere she manages to have two couples moving against each other in counterpoint, doing different movement patterns—harmonic but contrasting, like two solo dancers.

To my knowledge, the *Partita* is only the second time Tharp has used a conventional corps de ballet—*Push Comes to Shove* was the first—and again she resists every cliché associated with this most mundane of all ballet devices, though without letting its real identity and its function become lost. The corps enters first almost surreptitiously, behind some soloists, and they glide in and out, often in asymmetrical groupings. They're hardly ever still and hardly ever in unison, so you don't fix your eye on them as a block. But you are conscious, at certain moments, of them being there, underscoring some bit of action. Again thwarting expectation, Tharp doesn't assemble the corps and soloists for a big finale. Instead she subtracts people until only Gregory and her partner are left when the curtain comes down. They seem to become bigger than all 36 put together.

Collaborations are sufficiently rare in ballet that *Brahms/Handel* was bound to provoke curiosity. Among balletomanes and Tharpophiles the piece carried the freight of being Tharp's first engagement with the New York City Ballet, an event either long overdue or not to be tolerated, depending on your taste. The fact that she was sharing this debut with the City Ballet's senior ballet master and presiding popular choreographer added more burdens to the piece. Aside from speculation about the backstage politics in NYCB's shakedown year without its founder and guru Balanchine, I found the ballet hard to watch the first time, simply because I wanted to know which one of them had choreographed what. To me, Tharp and Robbins are totally different choreographic and aesthetic quantities; I could hardly imagine them working together, and I couldn't help seeing the piece at first as a set of clashing attitudes.

And they, pros that they are, were clever enough to make that the subject of the ballet. A group of dancers in royal blue and a group in saturated green share the stage. At first each group moves in a completely different style. Gradually each absorbs something from the aliens, until they achieve an integrated unity. The blue group is headed by Merrill Ashley and Ib Andersen, and they begin

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quite academically, with a simple classical motif that looks a bit like Balanchine's *Theme and Variations*. The music is a theme and variations too, Brahms to a Handel harpsichord piece. The green group, led by Maria Calegari and Bart Cook, appears after a while, from an upstage corner, with tight, fast and eccentric steps, like a gang of toughs skulking aggressively across the street against the light. So one group is raw and one is pristine. Tharp did the upstarts, and Robbins the button-downs?

I have no information about how the collaborators worked except that there was an amicable sharing of ideas and responsibilities. But I think I detect Robbinsisms in the blue group: dancers keeping time with the music by dipping up and down in plié; a frequent use of syncopation, with the dancer's downbeat coming on the music's second beat; a flamboyant jumping and displaying section for six men. Anyway, Robbins is the defender of the academic turf in this situation, even though his own choreography isn't exactly purist. And Tharp is the invader. The green group—hers, I decide—has her characteristic way of dancing close in to the body, of skittering somewhere fast while placing the limbs in odd angular shapes. The greens also do death-defying lifts that would rival Soviet ballet except that they're not at all flowing or graceful. Often the women are carried ramrod straight in front of the men, all stiff with flexed feet—but didn't Robbins use that lift years ago in *The Concert*?

Speed is the first thing that seems to rub off on the blue group. The principals switch partners: Cook and Ashley duet in the manner of the blue group while some greens posture in a tight formation upstage, totally unrelated to them. It gets harder to keep track of the two groups. Although there are six couples of each color besides the principals, you seldom see them in separate units, and even when you do, they're in uneven numbers, subgroups of five or seven, or they're working asymmetrically against an oddly numbered bunch of the other team. Gradually, members of the blues and greens begin to mingle. In the final fugue the mixing completes itself and each of the 28 dancers gets a partner of the opposite color. The groups stay mixed but on the curtain the leaders regain their original partners.

My first reaction to *Brahms/Handel* was disappointment: too much confusion, I thought, and the joke too obvious. Later, when I knew where it was going, the messiness of unreconciled styles and untrackable groups bothered me less and the kinky wit began to grow on me. I especially loved a moment—it couldn't have lasted more than four bars—when in the background I noticed about six dancers lying flat on their backs on the floor doing the motions of plié-relevé or some such classroom warmup usually done on two feet. The end of the ballet is huge and riotous, with masses of people surging across the stage and the women being lifted, standing up, high above the shoulders of a rushing phalanx, and plunging headlong into the bodies below, and emerging miraculously alive. Even

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this sequence has been derived from the blue-green materials: Maria Calegari's first entrance is made standing on the shoulders of several green men, looking like some statue in a religious procession, until she suddenly pitches forward and is caught inches from the ground; and later Merrill Ashley dives fearlessly into clusters of running men and is shoved and slid through the air without a wrinkle.

By the last night—*Brahms/Handel* was so popular that it won the season's closing spot—the dancers appeared to be having fun with the piece, and I liked it better than ever. Still, it seems paradoxical to me that Tharp should be doing this piece now, for the New York City Ballet. Conceptually, it's almost identical to the work with which she entered the ballet world in 1973, *Deuce Coupe* for the Joffrey. Odd that she should be having to make the same point now, for what must be the most sophisticated ballet audience in New York, while across the plaza she's doing the most complex, classical piece of her career, for the eclectic, often banally fashionable folks at American Ballet Theater.

Then in mid-July Tharp came up with a cobweb of a dance for her own John Carrafa and three women. *Sorrow Floats*, to "Jeux d'Enfants" of Georges Bizet, is about as close to a story about specific characters as Tharp ever gets, but is really about the singular presence that is John Carrafa. One of Tharp's great gifts, and a reason why she can work so successfully as a freelance, is that she gets turned on by the particular qualities of performers and is able to create works for them as personal as they might make for themselves. She does this sometimes when a new dancer joins her company: teasing out what nobody in their prior careers has ever seen, turning them into stars overnight.

Carrafa joined the Tharp company in 1978, and two years later emerged as the clown-innocent in her semi-autobiographical *When We Were Very Young*. A later incarnation of this character played a major role, the Poet, in *The Catherine Wheel*. Now he has a whole ballet to himself. Carrafa's special quality is imagination. He seems to dance, even in non-dramatic roles, as if in a dream where wonderful things keep happening to him; he doesn't suppress these images as they arise but responds to them, takes them into the choreography.

In *Sorrow Floats* he wears a white Pierrot suit and shows us what a resourceful, lonely person does to amuse himself. He conjures up three females (Jennifer Way, Shelley Washington, Katie Glasner), who become capricious playmates, butterflies, and "little people," and who finally incite him to shoot them in exasperation with an imaginary popgun. As he's walking away, they revive and shoot him in the back. The ending is false, but it's over quickly, and what you remember is Carrafa's delicacy and timing, and his total belief that the girl in his arms is an illusion. Tharp is always generous to dancers, but she has seldom been more charming.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

One of a Kind

ACADEMIC BIOGRAPHIES are encouraged by the information explosion of modern scholarship to get longer and talkier all the time. Now, with Irvin Ehrenpreis's life of Swift,[1] they've gone about as far as they can go: not six hundred or twelve hundred but two thousand pages—was there ever a life that required or merited *two thousand* pages?—of the usual except so much more than usual sheer accumulation and matching commentary; stamina and stuffed owls. Ehrenpreis began on a rather modest scale, which sure enough in due time he broke out of with ominously swelling presumptuousness as he advanced from tome to tome: the last of the three volumes has now at last been published, twenty-one years after the skinny first, which now looks like the Table of Contents when lined up on a shelf with the jumbo second and the Brobdingnagian third. Swift, who had a comedian's appetite for lists, catalogs, brute busy-work, untrammeled gung-ho mediocrity (cf. his stupefyingly exhaustive manual of social chit-chat, *A Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation*), would have congratulated Ehrenpreis and noted with a straight face that (1) the longest journey begins with a single step; (2) practice makes perfect; and (3) two thousand pages are (or is) a lot of pages. But, as Flaubert would opine a century later in his own hospitable *Dictionary of Platitudes*, "PROSE. Easier to write than verse"; and "PRINTING. Marvelous invention. Has done more harm than good." Also: "BLONDES. Hotter than brunettes"; "BRUNETTES. Hotter than blondes"; "NEGRESSES. Hotter than white women. (See BLONDES and BRUNETTES.)"; "REDHEADS. (See BLONDES, BRUNETTES, and NEGRESSES.)"; "LAKE. Have a woman with you when you sail on it."

Ehrenpreis teems with comparable worldly commonplaces, pearls of wisdom, for instance while he's giving us the lowdown on the unconscious motivation of a subject who (like another illustrious Dubliner) when jung was easily freudened: "if we assume that . . . [Swift] resented his mother's apparent neglect of him, but that he could not admit such a complaint openly (even to himself), an obvious question is what became of the feeling"; "The poem has a deal of unintentionally phallic imagery, suggesting that Swift was symbolically castrating a father figure"; "By attaching himself to an in-

[1] SWIFT: THE MAN, HIS WORKS, AND THE AGE, by *Irvin Ehrenpreis*. Three volumes. Harvard University Press. Vol. I, $20.00; Vol. II, $35.00; Vol. III, $35.00.

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valid, a man can relieve himself of angry impulses without openly admitting them, because the beloved is always suffering a punishment that he has not administered. Without feeling guilty, therefore, he can indulge a kind of sadism, even prolonging the existence of the woman [with shots? prostheses?] in order to prolong his participation in her suffering"; "Behind the fantasy is probably the unconscious wish for a union with the dead Stella"; "he would have liked (unconsciously, of course) . . ." Of course. Or, as Flaubert puts the case, "TOAD. Male of the frog. His venom is very dangerous. Lives inside a stone." Where he shares his quarters with Denis Donoghue, who reviewed *Swift* for the *Times Literary Supplement*: "It is surprising to find . . . [Ehrenpreis] claiming, or confessing, that 'much of my discussion of Stella and Vanessa is speculation based on Freudian psychology or on inferences drawn from a few data.' Freudian motifs or paradigms are not very noticeable in the book, presumably because they are now so thoroughly assimilated that it is hard to recognize them for what they are." Of course.

Still, motifs and paradigms aren't everything, and Ehrenpreis had a graver cause for worry than any defect in his psychology. It takes the form of a question he must have asked himself (unconsciously, of course) more and more often as he pushed ahead: Why oh why am I consecrating two thousand pages and the best years of my life to a character—and I do mean a *character!*—that despite my fancy explanations I have less and less of a grip on as I recklessly push ahead? No doubt Ehrenpreis had set forth with aspirations of marshaling the instruments and advantages of modern scholarship to produce the all-out all-in all-time no-nonsense biography of a major writer who had so far been left undone but whose importance could not be challenged. The trouble is that Swift wasn't your average orthodox great spirit (which helps to account for his having evaded the academic steamroller). The facts of his life and career aren't reassuring to readers and scholars who look for triumph, tragedy, and apotheosis. Swift was a very peculiar man, an obdurate and self-satisfied bundle of idiosyncrasies which he never bothered to conceal or modify, which aren't susceptible to traditional or conventional moral formulas, which defy tact and consistency, which Ehrenpreis's Freudian scrapings don't come anywhere near the quick of, which served Swift well all his life and protected him against every fatal retribution they perpetually solicited. True, he didn't become a bishop, but in view of what he was it's a kind of miracle that he became Dean of St. Patrick's. True, he faded after three score and ten and was declared legally incompetent at the age of seventy-five, but most of us would be glad to settle for a run of seventy-five years of pretty much having things our own way.

"Compared with the ideal of a definitive biography, the present volume has more faults than its author has blushes," says Ehrenpreis coyly, hiding his face behind his fan as he opens Volume I,

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but—pulling himself together—"compared with available biographies, it aims at a new standard of thoroughness and accuracy." (The schizophrenia of the writing—tough-minded pretensions *versus* actual timid slitheriness—is typical: he doesn't mean that "available biographies" didn't "aim" at that "new standard"; he starts by intending to say, toughly, that though others didn't achieve it Ehrenpreis will, but then remembers his manners and retreats into just "aiming" at it, which leaves his predecessors aiming at the outmoded biographical standard of fribble and fibs.) "I have drawn many parallels between Swift and his contemporaries," says Ehrenpreis, preparing us for his laborious endeavor to show that Swift is less peculiar than modern readers might imagine who aren't minutely familiar with the potfuls of documentation these volumes will supply about Irish and English society and politics between Swift's dates (1667-1745). "I have been less concerned to add than to eliminate fables [Swiftian irony? is he actually adding some while eliminating more? but here he sounds like Swift impersonating the sublimely impervious and beleaguered astrologer Isaac Bickerstaff, who keeps climbing out by digging a deeper and deeper hole]; and those readers who look for my views on a long train of legendary Swiftiana will search in vain." First of the hard-nosed biographers.

Ehrenpreis already suspects that he has big problems, and he's trying to wish them away as early as this first page of his preface. Yes, he keeps telling himself and us, Swift was a complicated man, but all I need to do is keep my eye on the facts, and the portrait will take care of itself. The facts, though, prove to be thornier than he would like. Very early and continuing through the second volume his tone is cool or defensive, as if he's disappointed and uneasy because Swift on many occasions isn't thinking or acting as a great spirit should, though Ehrenpreis isn't ready to denounce or renounce him—yet—and will express only an occasional muted qualification: "[Stella] turned for advice to her best friend [Swift], who, alas, happened as well to be the rival for her attentions"; "Swift's essay would be clever enough if he had left it in this shape. Rather than do so, alas, he chose to stand the entire construction upon its head . . ."; "Swift, alas, writing about the episode the following autumn or winter, elaborately affirms the truth of his friends' melodramatic fantasy" (Ehrenpreis means, of course, not that Swift "affirms the truth" of anything whatever, but that Swift's friends have told an *un*truth which now Swift brazenly swears to)—"alas" comes to be the tic that signifies an emergency in Ehrenpreis's reluctance to cope with something Swift has said or done and shouldn't have.

Sixteen years passed between Volumes II and III, and in the interval Ehrenpreis seems to have made up his mind that in the last volume Swift was going to be splendid and magnanimous no matter what; and the word that replaces "alas" is "noble": "It is a mark of Swift's nobility . . ."; "his noblest sympathies"; "Swift . . . declared—I

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think, nobly—"; "his peculiar nobility." In England between 1711 and 1714 Swift was friend and colleague of Addison, Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot; constant dinner-companion to the Queen's chief minister, Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford; intimate of the Secretary of State, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke; he had been deflected by his association with these great men of England, by their reliance on him, by the headiness of celebrity and political power; but now at last he was on the right path:

> Only after Queen Anne died [in 1714] was Swift able to relax this attachment to particular men. Gradually then, as Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, he came to devote himself to the good of a nation. During the years when he wrote *The Drapier's Letters*, his dedication grew deeper until the object of Swift's finest allegiance became humble, productive humanity (1724-5).

Swift, who after the Earl of Oxford's fall and the Queen's death was virtually exiled from England and obliged to live in obscurity in Ireland among "a people he pitied but despised," would in spite of himself (so goes Ehrenpreis's scenario) learn by suffering: "Without the lessons of the next five years [1714-19], without the softening, deepening effects of changing a way of life that he loved for one he resented, Swift would have remained a brilliant pamphleteer, satirist, and poet. But he would never have risen to the power of *The Drapier's Letters*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *A Modest Proposal*."

It all sounds like hearts and flowers and the apotheosis we've been waiting for, unless we're unlucky enough to find the pages of this new writer no different in tone and temperament from the pages of the old. *The Drapier's Letters* are brilliant pamphleteering all right, leveled against an English scheme that would have debased the coinage in Ireland; indeed far more brilliant and more soundly grounded than the preposterously overrated (by Ehrenpreis) smarmy and nasty political hack-work Swift eagerly produced—pluming himself as the armed official guardian of law and order—for the Tory paper *The Examiner* during the years when he was the Tory administration's bloodthirstiest hatchet-man. Besides, the *Letters* established Swift for the rest of his life as the irreproachable hero of the Irish populace against odious impositions by the English government; and he relished and for his friends complacently called to mind with the latest instances the reverence and deference paid him by tradesmen and passersby whenever he descended to the streets of Dublin for his brisk constitutional (he was a devout and missionary walker, an *ur*-aerobicist). In 1737—Swift was seventy and had basked in this mellowing sun of idolatry for well over a decade—he wrote his routine fiery pamphlet against a mild and workable political proposal by the Anglican Primate of Ireland, Archbishop Boulter (but it was on the old red-rag topic of the coin-

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age, and for Swift disagreement was never mild); attending a banquet with Boulter at the time, Swift told him that if it hadn't been for Swift's interposition Boulter "would have been torn to pieces by the mob [inflamed by Swift's pamphlet], and that if . . . [Swift] held up his finger he could make them do it that instant." It's worth recalling here—and at almost any moment it's almost impossible to recall—that Swift was an Anglican clergyman; also, ecclesiastically subordinate to the man to whom he was entrusting this information. "Noble" was never the word for Swift, and over and over again he got away with murder.

In the self-dramatizing epitaph he wrote for himself in his will, he even prescribed just how we should summarily recollect him forever after—"Here lies . . . where fierce indignation can lacerate his heart no further" (to be carved on "Black Marble . . . in large Letters, deeply cut, and strongly gilded")—and he got away with that too; but that self-applied tag, *saeva indignatio*, whereby in accordance with his final instructions we have ever since meekly distinguished him from other literary lights, can be allowed to be what it professes to be only as it designates the feeling which supermarket shoppers have in a checkout line when they notice somebody sidle into it ahead of them with a shopping cart full of groceries. Swift acknowledged on another occasion his propensity for "rage and resentment"; he hadn't the talent for humane and generous indignation that, confronted for example with Soame Jenyns' "philosophical" vindication of pain and evil, Samuel Johnson had; Swift was a choleric and self-righteous man, anything or anybody he disapproved of or disagreed with was a personal insult to him, and he struck back as quickly and damagingly as he could. This quality of his is so pervasive through his life and writings, it almost seems that to mention it verifies it; but one of his late pamphlets illustrates it in an exceptionally simple and direct way. The history of "A Proposal for Giving Badges to Beggars in All the Parishes of Dublin" is related by Herbert Davis, editor of Swift's *Collected Prose*, in the Introduction to Volume Thirteen:

> It was dated April 22, 1737, and that was presumably the time when Swift finished writing it. It works out more fully an idea which he had jotted down earlier on a paper, dated Deanery House, September 26, 1726. There he had proposed that the Archbishop of Dublin should call the clergy together and renew the attempt to enforce on beggars the wearing of badges to show what parish they belonged to, and to prevent them from begging elsewhere.

"Strollers, foreigners [beggars from other parishes], and sturdy beggars" having nevertheless been perverse enough to increase and multiply year after year, Swift now resumed his demand for strict

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enforcement and "providing severe penalties if they did not wear badges which showed where they belonged." Swift's "admirable pamphlet," says Davis, who thinks Swift is cute when he's mad, "gives a delightful glimpse of the proud Dean, who was 'personally acquainted with a great number of stout beggars,' roused to anger by these miserable wretches who were 'too proud to be seen with a badge, as many of them have confessed to me.' And he tells us that this 'absurd insolence' has so affected him that for some years past he has not disposed of a single farthing to a stout beggar." Here's a characteristic passage from the pamphlet:

> I cannot but take Notice of the great Indiscretion in our City-Shopkeepers, who suffer their Doors to be daily besieged by Crowds of Beggars, (as the Gates of a Lord are by Duns,) to the great Disgust and Vexation of many Customers, whom I have frequently observed to go to other Shops, rather than suffer such a Persecution; which might easily be avoided, if no Foreign Beggars were allowed to infest them.
>
> WHEREFORE, I do assert, that the Shopkeepers who are the greatest Complainers of this Grievance, (lamenting that for every Customer, they are worried by fifty Beggars,) do very well deserve what they suffer, when a 'Prentice with a Horse-Whip is able to lash every Beggar from the Shop, who is not of the Parish, and doth not wear the Badge of that Parish on his Shoulder, well fastned and fairly visible; and if this Practice were universal in every House, to all the sturdy Vagrants, we should in a few Weeks clear the Town of all Mendicants, except those who have a proper Title to our Charity: As for the Aged and Infirm, it would be sufficient to give them nothing, and then they must starve or follow their Brethren.

Mistily eulogizing the latter-day Swift for choosing as "the object of . . . [his] finest allegiance . . . humble, productive humanity," Ehrenpreis has the caginess to cover Swift's limitations with those last two adjectives: Swift wastes no patience on the idle poor, who had better get productive and humble or else. Ehrenpreis is bent on transmuting Swift into an intermittent if not full-time angel of justice and charity; but Swift hasn't changed, though the country and the circumstances have. Moreover, Ehrenpreis's insistence on exalting Swift leads him into ludicrous conjectures and comparisons: e.g. as regards Johnson, "whose antipathy to Swift," says Ehrenpreis, "was partly a reaction against early admiration and partly the effect of their deep similarity." Psychology again. Probably no men of the eighteenth century were more unlike than these two in temperament, personality, character, belief. Swift couldn't understand why people didn't instantly do the reasonable things he told them to do, and he grew furious when they didn't: though now and then he

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could make a joke about being so cocksure, he seems never to have had a doubt about the correctness of his conduct at every moment and of whatever opinions or feelings he happened to have at the moment. Johnson, on the other hand, understood all too well why people, including himself, were unable to live rationally or even to discover what living rationally meant: he paid his respects to the community of mankind ("I rejoice to concur with the common reader"); but, rejoicing or lamenting, he didn't stand outside it, he shared the baffling common fate and expressed it nobly in a charitable and heart-breaking Christian hope—"there will surely come a time, when every capacity of happiness shall be filled, and none shall be wretched but by his own fault." Johnson's reservations in his *Life of Swift* may have had something to do with his sense that Swift, knowing he was right all the time, rejected compassion and hope and invited nothing but agreement.

Ehrenpreis offers a crabbed and far-fetched paradox contrived to demonstrate that Swift was not only privately but from an elevated philosophical position a benevolent and charitable man; and once again he depends on a comparison:

> While claiming to sympathize with La Rochefoucauld's reduction of all motives to self-love, Swift carried the burden of charity in every form, from alms-giving to dangerous political action. By claiming to trust in human nature, [his friend and correspondent] Bolingbroke relieved himself of the need to care for men who fell beneath his standard. . . .
>
> Swift's view of course was that the defects of human nature were universal, and that even the striving toward Christian morality or rational conduct was a tragically rare phenomenon. Bolingbroke, like Voltaire, took Locke's observation that reason governs very few men, and debased it to the view that poor, humble labouring men must always exist, that they must always be ruled by passion and superstition, and that the few real men governed by reason would always be found among those of his own quality. . . .

I have edited down to the few lines that give it away the three or four pages of Ehrenpreis's tortured and repetitive party-line, partipris piffle, the first sentence of that second paragraph being so breathtaking a misstatement (veiled of course by "of course") of Swift's invariable, conscious, deliberate, explicit, unashamed, overriding, blatant, frequently and thunderously expressed egocentrism ("*I* am the law and the prophets!") that Ehrenpreis must have written it at 3 A.M. in the dark and never read it. But Ehrenpreis has dragged another big name in to bear the brunt of comparison: poor Voltaire (who takes a few other jabs too for being shallow, frivolous, uncharitable, unphilosophical). Flaubert's *Dictionary of Platitudes*:

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"VOLTAIRE. Famous for his frightful grin or *rictus*. His learning superficial." Ehrenpreis sometimes writes like a scholar who, having staked his career on a single (or married) figure, has never looked at or thought about anybody else. But hardly anything else could explain and nothing could excuse this parenthetical dismissal of a much greater man than Swift. And Voltaire carried a much heavier "burden of charity in every form" than Swift or anybody else of the epoch. His humanitarian and philanthropic activities proceeded over many years with no thanks from contemporaries then or Ehrenpreis now, at the uninterrupted risk of exile (not "exile") or imprisonment, and were on as grand a scale as possible for a private citizen, from founding, financing, and maintaining an entire town of religious and political refugees to defending with blizzards of pamphlets and letters numerous victims or if too late for them their families and their memory against a savagely coercive feudal combination of church and state that makes the "tyrannical" England Swift attacked look like a pussycat, and that, reminding us of the magnitude of the effort exacted by the forces Voltaire took on, makes Swift's benevolence and charity look like *pro forma* penny-ante Sunday-morning collection-plate contributions.

Swift was not a Christian hero; or a philosopher; or a statesman-like pundit. According to Ehrenpreis "Swift seldom wrote better" or with loftier "moral idealism" than in the *Examiner* essays; but the "style" of these essays is anonymous ins-*versus*-outs pro or con political toadyism or railing ("it will be necessary upon Occasion, to detect the Malice and Falshood of some popular Maxims, which those Idiots scatter from the Press twice a Week"), and the pieces are now remarkable only for their poisonous, occasionally factual and justified, and in their time extremely effective debunking of the greatest military commander England had ever had, the Duke of Marlborough. Nor can Swift be said to have been a political cynic who knew better but did the dirty job for pay or notoriety. He meant what he wrote; his "habitual fear of freedom of expression" (Ehrenpreis's term) didn't allow him to accept the value of a free-for-all of ideas; he pestered Bolingbroke to "swinge" and imprison Whig journalists who ventured to reply in kind to Swift's polemics, and during recurrent spells of panic he seriously expected to be hanged as soon as Oxford's ministry was overthrown; he seems to have believed that the fictions and misrepresentations he knowingly propagated (Ehrenpreis documents them) were indispensable to the interests of the Tory ascendancy and that, being indispensable, they were *true*. Swift was no historian either, though he unsuccessfully lobbied for the post of Historiographer Royal and tried for years to publish his indiscreet and simple-mindedly partisan history of the Oxford-Bolingbroke administration because he thought it the best writing he had done; but Bolingbroke advised him not to, presumably influenced by its indiscretions but also calling it what it was, a "party

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pamphlet": one index of Swift's incapacity for self-criticism is that even many years after the hurly-burly of daily events that provoked them he could confuse political-campaign pronouncements with history.

He was a great satirist; yet the satires on the basis of which he occupies a position of such at least academic preëminence are surprisingly few, and they don't measure up to what Ehrenpreis and the outline-histories make of them. Ehrenpreis is so dazzled by *A Tale of a Tub* that he spends three chapters of his first volume analyzing and (I think) praising it:

> Under the stunning complications of its surface, the *Tale* has an intellectual symmetry. Everywhere in it, Swift is preaching the same lesson. His countrymen's lives should possess the virtue and cultivation of Graeco-Roman antiquity, improved by Christian ethics and a cheering hope of salvation. To put themselves in this condition, they had only to accept the doctrines of the Church of England and the political constitution of 1688, to let their understanding instruct them in decisions outside the province of revelation, and to form their taste from the monuments of unageing intellect [where have I heard *that* before?]. Instead of doing so, they swarmed after crazy sectarians, threw the reins to their passions, and either ignored the classics or anatomized them to dust. Where order belonged, they established chaos.

How thrilling: the American university lecturer rampant over the yawning cadavers stacked wall to wall in Hubris Hall, The Age of Pffft and Swope, MWF3. Furthermore, the allegory is puerile and predictably or trivially developed; the allusions and erudition are of the type that brightens the lidless eyes of learned annotators; and the moral aim either asserts itself as tediously as Ehrenpreis's synopsis suggests, or with many winks and nudges digresses into this or that more or less amusing preoccupation with "fanatics" (Swift's term for nonconformist English Protestants) or critics or lunatics or pedants which sooner or later finds its way to the bitter end of the alimentary canal; the climactic episode being the one in which Jack (the "fanatic" or Calvinist) is so set on making use of Scripture as a guide in every contingency that, when it fails him, he gamely sticks with the pungent social disadvantage resulting:

> JACK had provided a fair Copy of his Father's *Will* [the Bible; get it?], engrossed in Form upon a large Skin of Parchment; and resolving to act the Part of a most dutiful Son, he became the fondest Creature of it imaginable. For, altho', as I have often told the Reader, it consisted wholly in certain plain, easy Directions about the management and wearing of their Coats, with Legacies and Penalties, in case of Obedience or Neglect; yet he began to

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> entertain a Fancy, that the Matter was *deeper* and *darker*, and therefore must needs have a great deal more of Mystery at the Bottom. *Gentlemen*, said he, *I will prove this very Skin of Parchment to be Meat, Drink, and Cloth, to be the Philosopher's Stone, and the Universal Medicine.* In consequence of which Raptures, he resolved to make use of it in the most necessary, as well as the most paltry Occasions of Life. He had a Way of working it into any Shape he pleased; so that it served him for a Night-cap when he went to Bed, and for an Umbrello in rainy Weather. He would lap a Piece of it about a sore Toe, or when he had Fits, burn two Inches under his Nose; or if any Thing lay heavy on his Stomach, scrape off and swallow as much of the Powder as would lie on a silver Penny, they were all infallible Remedies. With Analogy to these Refinements, his common Talk and Conversation, ran wholly in the Phrase of his Will, and he circumscribed the utmost of his Eloquence within that Compass, not daring to let slip a Syllable without Authority from thence. Once at a strange House, he was suddenly taken short, upon an urgent Juncture, whereon it may not be allowed too particularly to dilate; and being not able to call to mind, with that Suddenness, the Occasion required, an Authentick Phrase for demanding the Way to the Backside; he chose rather as the more prudent Course, to incur the Penalty in such Cases usually annexed. Neither was it possible for the united Rhetorick of Mankind to prevail with him to make himself clean again: Because having consulted the Will upon this Emergency, he met with a Passage near the Bottom (whether foisted in by the Transcriber, is not known) which seemed to forbid it.

What a bore. And Jack's resolution of the crisis is too messy and unlikely to seem funny to me. Why didn't Swift conclude by having Jack "make use of" a relevant passage of Scripture "to make himself clean again"? (Not much funnier, but at any rate it cleans up the act.) It would at once occur and appeal to Swift; but he didn't quite have the nerve. Too bad, because anyhow many a Christian who read what he did have the nerve to write here thought it ungodly and thought its author, this far-out clergyman, "hardly a Christian" as another clergyman put it. (A generation later, along came still another clergyman, Laurence Sterne, who took not Scripture but *A Tale of a Tub* as his guide, studying not its metaphysics or moral philosophy but its techniques of digression and innuendo, which in *Tristram Shandy* he then made use of more subtly, more diversely, and more comically than Swift ever did.)

I'm obliged to confess that Johnson himself excluded from his distaste for Swift *A Tale of a Tub* (for which some of his admiration may have been sectarian, because he could see what naïve readers couldn't—that not only wasn't it a brief for irreligion, but rather, with Swift's customary overreaching foregone conclusions, it strenu-

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ously championed the Church of England, to which Johnson was committed just as strenuously): Johnson told Boswell that it has "such a vigour of mind, such a swarm of thoughts, . . . is so superiour to his other writings, that one can hardly believe he was the authour of it." An eccentricity of Swift's was to publish his works without his name on them and to deny even to friends that he was the author: this began as prudence, because from the outset what he wrote disturbed people who might have something to do with his prospects in the Church; but it persisted throughout his life. *A Tale of a Tub*, which to the eyes of conventional piety looked like a raving atheist tract (and looks are more than skin-deep and less than deceiving), was such a shocker that he took special pains to disavow it. But only with many winks and nudges, because he was proud of it; and everybody knew, even Johnson really.

On the occasion of Johnson's kind words about *A Tale*, he went on to remark to Boswell about *Gulliver's Travels*: "When once you have thought of big men and little men, it is very easy to do all the rest." Everyone who reads remembers having as a child come across *Gulliver* and been fascinated and perhaps slightly frightened and repelled by it. For children it's, the first two sections anyway, a good-bad dream and wish-fulfillment fantasy, down to the fearful and forbidden act of Gulliver's firehose gush of urine to extinguish the fire in the Queen's palace (I would like to point out to Denis Donoghue that there are Freudian implications here). Children don't have the reaction to *Gulliver* that, as Swift informed Pope, a certain Irish bishop had, who "said, that Book was full of improbable lies, and for his part, he hardly believed a word of it." Still, for grown-ups *Gulliver* is more a bright idea which is carefully and consistently worked out than an inventive and eventful fable; and it suffers from Swift's itch, whenever the narrative gives him an inch of room, to broadcast still another campaign speech in favor of his plans for Utopia: "All Crimes against the State, are punished here with the utmost Severity; but if the Person accused make his Innocence plainly to appear upon his Tryal, the Accuser is immediately put to an ignominious Death; and out of his Goods or Lands, the innocent Person is quadruply recompensed for the Loss of his Time, for the Danger he underwent, for the Hardship of his Imprisonment, and for all the Charges he hath been at in making his Defence." Nor does Swift persuade me that all science is pernicious and silly or that the Houyhnhnms' social and sex lives are exemplary. *Gulliver's Travels* is often a mean-spirited and dreary diatribe against whatever Swift disliked, and he disliked many things that most of the rest of the human race finds interesting, attractive, absorbing, virtuous, useful, necessary.

Then there are the two other academically touted items in the Swift canon: *A Modest Proposal* and *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity*. Both use the satiric method of piling up logical but un-

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reasonable testimony in support of what the satirist considers an intellectual position so grotesquely untenable that readers will catch the drift of the satire very quickly. The *Argument*, for instance, assumes that "Liberty of Conscience" is *prima facie* so fundamentally unreasonable a notion that the satirist can sneer at it merely by appearing to defend it: "One great Advantage proposed by the Abolishing of Christianity is, That it would very much enlarge and establish Liberty of Conscience, that great Bulwark of our Nation"; but "I hope I shall be forgiven . . . if I" also defend a few ancient customs, such as the laws that keep shops and coffee-houses closed on Sundays: "Are fewer Claps got upon *Sundays* than other days?" This is a man who can't keep a civil tongue in his head. As for *A Modest Proposal*, I've always had while reading it the uncomfortable feeling that there's too much satisfaction in it, that Swift enjoyed the whole idea of it, as, say, children might enjoy the idea of pissing out to smoke and ashes a huge conflagration; the persona's enthusiasm for butchering, roasting, and eating children gets rather rank; and, though I prefer not to accuse Swift of potential cannibalism, at least he was always (theoretically) homicidal and dismemberment-minded about archbishops, perjurers, "aged and infirm" beggars, and political opponents: in his poem "To a Lady," he says about the Whigs,

> Like the ever-laughing sage,
> In a jest I spend my rage.
> (Though it must be understood,
> I would hang them if I could:)

—and I understand him, this man accustomed to having his own way even as he anathematizes the exceptions that life and other people dare to compel him to put up with; I believe he means what he says, commend his frankness, and thank God he isn't Attorney General.

Only once in his public pieces does the flame of his satire burn clear, perhaps because for once it's on a subject he can rate ephemeral enough to refrain from mixing it with raw rage and religion and politics. The Partridge sequence is the sort of hoax and parlor joke that Swift's friends and the London ladies he was seeing and flirting with at evening parties during this period might well have been brought in on; in any case it gains by remaining a hoax and a joke. There was this shameless and bragging astrologer, Partridge by name (a "fanatic" who besides peddling almanacs made the mistake of sniping at the Church of England; so Swift had another reason for giving him the business), who got away with murder (but only Swift was allowed to do that) by predicting deaths, catastrophes, and moderate to heavy rain in his annual almanacs, which were very popular and sold many copies. Swift decided to get back at him by inventing a rival astrologer, "Isaac Bickerstaff," under

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whose name was published in January 1708 *Predictions for the Year 1708*, "Written to prevent the People of England from being further impos'd on by vulgar Almanack-makers," of which the opening prediction was likely to rivet Partridge's passing glance:

> My first Prediction is but a Trifle; yet I will mention it, to shew how ignorant those sottish Pretenders to Astrology are in their own Concerns: It relates to *Partrige* the Almanack-Maker; I have consulted the Star of his Nativity by my own Rules; and find he will infallibly die upon the 29th of *March* next, about eleven at Night, of a raging Fever: Therefore I advise him to consider of it, and settle his Affairs in Time.

Promptly at the end of March followed what purported to be a disinterested (and unnamed) observer's *Account of Partridge's Death*, in which Partridge's last moments and deathbed repentance for his charlatanry are reported with pathetic and edifying detail; and that should have finished it, but at the beginning of 1709 Partridge came out with another year of his almanac and took the opportunity to declare himself incontestably alive against "the impudent lying fellow" who had predicted otherwise. Well! "Bickerstaff" responded with a *Vindication*, taking up more in sorrow than in anger Partridge's

> Objection . . . to an Article in my Predictions, which foretold the Death of Mr. *Partrige* to happen on *March* 29, 1708. This he is pleased to contradict absolutely in the Almanack he hath published for the present Year; and in that ungentlemanly Manner, (pardon the Expression) as I have above related. In that Work, he very roundly asserts, That he *is not only now alive, but was likewise alive upon that very* 29*th of* March, *when I had foretold* he *should die.* This is the Subject of the present Controversy between us; which I design to handle with all Brevity, Perspicuity, and Calmness: In this Dispute, I am sensible, the Eyes not only of *England*, but of all *Europe*, will be upon us: And the *Learned* in every Country will, I doubt not, take Part on that Side where they find most Appearance of Reason and Truth. . . .
> . . . I will plainly prove him to be dead, out of his own Almanack for this Year, and from the very Passage which he produceth to make us think him alive. He there says, *He is not only* now *alive, but was also alive upon that very* 29*th of* March, *which I foretold he should die on*: By this, he declares his Opinion, that a Man may be alive *now*, who was not alive a Twelve-month ago. And, indeed, there lies the Sophistry of his Argument. He dares not assert, he was alive ever since the 29th of *March*, but that he *is now alive, and was so on that Day*: I grant the latter, for he did not die till Night, as appears by the printed Account of his Death, in a *Letter to a*

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> *Lord*; and whether he be since revived, I leave the World to judge. This, indeed, is perfect cavilling, and I am ashamed to dwell any longer upon it.

If you wonder what's so funny, Ehrenpreis has the explanation: "Instead of treating the astrologer as a corpse, . . . Swift from the start alludes to him as alive, and yet continues to insist on the proofs of his decease. Between the absurdity of this situation and the reasonableness with which Swift expounds it, runs the contradiction that produces comedy." Oh.

The Partridge caper enabled Swift to mingle his public and private talents at their best. In his complex and peculiar life Swift the public scold was balanced by Swift the private comedian, the game-player, the parlor entertainer, the worshipper and practitioner of "*la bagatelle*": trifles, practical jokes, card-games, word-games, verses concocted according to arbitrary and exigent rules and recited extempore at parties or exchanged with friends through the mail; Swift the life of the party; above all Swift the charmer and ladies' man who knocked 'em dead: e.g., refusing to make the first move toward meeting a fashionable young woman whose beauty had already got her elected as "a toast" of a London club, he formally received her unconditional surrender and confirmed it in writing—

> We, out of our tender Regard to Truth and Justice, having heard and duly considered the Allegations of both Parties, do Declare, Adjudge, Decree, and Determine, That the said Mrs. [in the eighteenth century used for unmarried as well as married women] *Long*, notwithstanding any Privileges she may claim as aforesaid, as a Lady of the TOAST, shall, without Essoin or Demurr, in Two Hours after the Publishing of this our DECREE, make all Advances to the said Doctor, that he shall demand; And that the said Advances shall not be made to the said Doctor, as *Un Homme sans Consequence*; but purely upon Account of his great Merit.

He had a dispersed and platonic harem of many such sentimental connections with beautiful young women; nor were they casual and superficial, though years might pass between face-to-face encounters or between letters. When Anne Long died young (as Swift's ladies tended to do; he remarked mournfully to Bolingbroke, "I never knew a very deserving person of that sex who had not much reason to complain of ill health"), he wrote to Stella, "I never was more afflicted at any death"; and on a separate page of his account-book (where no eyes but his own could examine his daily record of every farthing he spent), "She was the most beautiful Person of the Age, she lived in, of great Honr and Virtue, infinite Sweetness and Generosity of Temper, and true Good Sense." When another beloved died—"poor dear Lady Ashburnham . . . the poor creature

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was with child. She was my greatest Favorite. . . . I hardly knew a more valuable Person"—he commented to Stella, "I hate Life, when I think it exposed to such Accidents, and to see so many thousand wretches burthening the Earth while such as her dye, makes me think God did never intend Life for a Blessing."

The two great loves of his life, however, on whom he bestowed the goddess-like private names they had in relation to him, Stella (Esther Johnson) and Vanessa (a name he made up by combining both of hers: Hester Vanhomrigh), gave him more than enough to handle. Especially Vanessa, who may have been the only woman he ever knew who made him think often and directly—or even *do* something!—about matters that, though too vain of his masculinity to ignore them altogether, he ordinarily derided with male bravado or loaded with excremental images. Vanessa was crazy about Swift and poured out her delirium of "unexpressible passion" like a smashing tragic heroine doomed to a scene of mere men:

> put my passion under the utmost restraint send me as distant from you as the earth will alow yet you cannot banish those charming Idaea's which will ever stick by me whilst I have the use of memory nor is the love I beare you only seated in my soul for there is not a single atome of my frame that is not blended with it therefor don't flatter your self that separation will ever change my sentiments for I find myself unquiet in the midst of silence and my heart is at once pierced with sorrow and love. . .
>
> I firmly believe could I know your thoughts (which no humane creature is capable of geussing at because never any one liveing thought like you) I should find you have often in a rage wished me religious hopeing then I should have paid my devotions to heaven but that would not spair you for was I an Enthusiast still you'd be the Deity I should worship what markes are there of a Deity but what you are to be known by you are present every where your D^r^ Image is before my eyes some times you strike me with that prodigious awe I tremble with fear at other times a charming compassion shines through your countynance, which revives my soul is it not more reasonable to adore a radiant forme one has seen than one only described

—intoxicating stuff for a fifty-three-year-old parson to be reading in the privacy of his chamber from the letters of a beautiful young woman (but "in her early thirties she was a blown rose," sniffily observes Ehrenpreis, who doesn't know "blown" means "in blossom"; but anyway give him Lolita over Aphrodite every time!) with whom he was carrying on a clandestine affair that included frequent "harmless" visits to her family home and occasional secret meetings elsewhere. (One of Swift's crosses was that his great loves, two Héloïses to his Professor Abelard, couldn't spell or punctuate even by

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the very liberal standards of the time; he used to reprove Stella for her bad spelling, with a pedagogic tone he tried to mask as good nature: "You must not be angry, for I will have you spell right, let the world go how it will.") Reacting to the passion of Vanessa's letters, he was lukewarm and cold and lukewarm again, with sudden hot flashes, or he wouldn't answer at all, or would threaten a break (maybe her heat and blasphemy had scared the hell out of him); but he couldn't give it up—and who could but a eunuch or a man of principle? He tries to tell the story in "Cadenus and Vanessa," but cleans it up and moralizes it ("Cadenus who could ne'er suspect / His lessons would have such effect"), wildly prevaricates ("He hardly knew, till he was told, / Whether the nymph was young or old"), and teases panting readers for all time with an uncrackable enigmatic stanza:

> But what success Vanessa met,
> Is to the world a secret yet;
> Whether the nymph, to please her swain,
> Talks in a high romantic strain;
> Or whether he at last descends
> To like with less seraphic ends;
> Or, to compound the business, whether
> They temper love and books together;
> Must never to mankind be told,
> Nor shall the conscious muse unfold.

For Swift the "less seraphic ends" were always cunt-and-bum, the feminine ending. Ehrenpreis doesn't like to deal with this obsession of Swift's, and tries to provide it with historical perspective and respectability by locating "the deepest moral implications of Swift's comic irony . . . [in] a principle which he shares with St. Augustine: that *inter urinas et faeces nascimur*, that the seat of love is the foulest place in our body." (In that last image Ehrenpreis sounds like Jack in *A Tale of a Tub* tackily settling down for life with one of the products of the seat of love; but Tristram Shandy's Uncle Toby would on the other hand—or foot—"wipe it up and say no more about it.") First of all, Ehrenpreis's generalization is ridiculously narrow: Swift the comedian can be higher and livelier than that. (But Ehrenpreis's "deepest moral implications" isn't an idea, it's a scholarly sneeze.) Secondly, Swift isn't so impartial as Augustine. The mystery of Swift's sexual nature is that he seeks out, compliments, baits, bullies, instructs, flirts with, pays attention and listens to women (in the first version of "On His Own Deafness," written when he was sixty-seven, the closing couplet reads: "And what's incredible, alack, / No more I hear a woman's clack"), perseveringly loves them, but perseveringly objects to that physiological coincidence (which doesn't seem to bother him in men, probably because men don't interest

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him as much). When he starts turning out (and publishing!) in his sixties those very peculiar odes on women and excrement (nobody seems to have noticed that they were all written or at least published after all his favorite ladies were dead), what the poems regret is that (not Strephon but) "Celia, Celia, Celia shits!" whereupon Strephon, merely "peeping," is "punished" by "Vengeance, goddess never sleeping," who ordains that from now on "His foul imagination links / Each dame he sees with all her stinks." This sad burst of candor is almost all Swift needs to say about the obsession; also almost all anybody needs to say nowadays, except to restate, in the absence of even any durable malicious gossip to the contrary, the likelihood of his lifelong celibacy.

Certainly the obsession didn't prevent him from being Stella's almost faultless lover: charming, affectionate, involved, confiding, doting, baby-talking, lifelong (*her* life: coming to Moor Park as secretary to Sir William Temple Swift met her there, a member of the household, when she was eight; became her tutor; and soon knew her intimately—except in the physiological and Biblical sense? "I ne'er admitted love a guest," he says in one of his poems to her—till her death thirty-nine years later). Ehrenpreis believes they were never married. Others believe they were, including among them some of Swift's friends and also Johnson, who had the story with date, place, and clergyman (a bishop no less) only a generation after Swift's death from a reliable survivor; but nobody tries very hard to assert that the marriage, if it happened, was consummated. Replying to a suitor of Stella's (whom Stella had asked to consult Swift for his opinion and permission), Swift grants that marriage is "held . . . necessary and convenient . . . for ladies" but only because "time takes off from the lustre of virgins in all other eyes but mine." There's a well established story that Swift made a point of never seeing Stella alone. At any rate she lived with an older woman, a kind of duenna, Rebecca Dingley; Swift's letters were addressed to the two of them, but this convention scarcely seems to have inhibited his expressions of affection and intimacy and sometimes makes them sound very strange.

The *Journal to Stella* (a literary-historical title first applied long after Swift's death) consists of sixty-five letters that Swift addressed to the two ladies in Dublin between September 1710 and June 1713, during his stay in London when, for most of that period, he was in the thick of the literary and political life of the capital. It's Swift in carpet-slippers, at home (away from home), in his prime (middle forties), agitated or depressed or exuberant or at ease, in love and trying to impress his beloved, boasting of his acquaintance and influence, boasting of his despotic power (at a card-party he seats himself next to the Duke of Marlborough's daughter, who won't "give one Look, nor say a word to me"—and all he has done is ruin her father's reputation! but "she is a fool for her Pains, & I'll pull

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her down"); using what he calls "the little language" (progenitor of Finneganese) to convey his sense of amorous intimacy (" 'Tis pretty late now ung oomens, so I bid oo Nite own deedallars"; "Nite my twodeelest logues"; "o Rold, dlunken Srut drink pdfrs health ten times in a molning; you are a whetter, fais I sup Mds 15 times evly molning in milk porridge, lele's fol oo now, and lele's fol ee Rettle, & evly kind of sing"; "Farewell deelest deel Md, and rove pdfr dearly dearly. Farewell Md Md FW FW FW Me Me Me Lele lele lele lele lele—& lele and lele aden": "pdfr" is Swift; "Md" is "My dear"; "Me" is Dingley; God knows what "lele" is; and work out the rest for yourselves); or catching the moment on the wing: "I had something to say, but cannot call it to mind. (What was it?)"; or recording a winter day in London—

> Morning. It has snowed terribly all night, and is vengeance cold. I am not yet up, but cannot write long; my hands will freeze. Is there a good fire, Patrick? Yes, Sir; then I'll rise, come take away the candle. You must know I write on the dark side of my bedchamber, and am forced to have a candle till I rise, for the bed stands between me and the window, and I keep the curtains shut this cold weather. So pray let me rise, and, Patrick, here take away the candle.—At night, We are now here in high frost and snow, the largest fire can hardly keep us warm. It is very ugly walking, a baker's boy broke his thigh yesterday. I walk slow, make short steps, and never tread on my heel. 'Tis a good proverb the Devonshire people have; Walk fast in snow, In frost walk slow, And still as you go, Tread on your toe: When frost and snow are both together, Sit by the fire and spare shoe-leather. I dined today with Dr. Cockburn, but will not do so again in haste, he has generally such a parcel of Scots with him.

—very often feeling his oats ("Patrick . . . gives me five letters out of his pocket. I read the superscription of the first, Pshoh, said I; of the second, Pshoh again; of the third, Pshah, Pshah, Pshah; of the fourth, A Gad, A Gad, A Gad, I'm in a rage; of the fifth and last, O hoooa; aye marry this is something, this is our MD, so truly we opened it, I think immediately . . ."; and never lets on to MD that he's seeing and corresponding with Vanessa all this time!); on another cold morning says something that shakes one's faith in their mutual forbearance (" 'tis still terribly cold.—I wish my cold hand was in the warmest place about you, young women, I'd give ten guineas upon that account with all my heart, faith; oh, it starves my thigh; so I'll rise, and bid you good morrow, my ladies both, good morrow"; and what in the world did Dingley make of *this*?); and all the while the business of government and the infinitely vexatious negotiations for the peace with France are going on and Swift is dining daily with the government leaders, very proud of himself for

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being there, puffed up with inside information, reporting to the ladies as much of it as he feels he's allowed to, endlessly dreaming and despairing of church preferment but stymied (as he knows he is but never knows by whom because his best friends—the Lord High Treasurer and the Secretary of State—won't tell him) by the Queen's horror of a clergyman who seems "hardly a Christian"; eventually exiled (as it seems to him) back to Ireland with the consolation prize of the Deanery of St. Patrick's (and back to the ladies in Dublin). He's an irrepressible naughty boy who is never caught *in flagrante*; who, despite the fact that he doesn't become Primate of England or even an Irish bishop, wins the marbles, beats the odds, bluffs and browbeats the whole wide world. He isn't a great spirit but it's a great journal.

It's his poems, though, where he is freest, tossing them off as insouciantly as if poetry is less significant than prose. When the Countess of Meath dies on a Monday and her husband, General Gorges, dies the following Friday and they are buried together on Sunday, Swift is moved to write "An Elegy on Dicky and Dolly":

> Under this stone lie Dicky and Dolly,
> Doll dying first, Dick grew melancholy,
> For Dick without Doll thought living a folly.
>
> Dick lost in Doll a wife tender and dear,
> But Dick lost by Doll, twelve hundred a year,
> A loss that Dick thought, no mortal could bear. . . .
>
> One bed while alive held both Doll and Dick,
> One coach oft carried them when they were quick,
> One grave now contains them both *haec* and *hic*. . . .
>
> Here quiet they lie, in hopes to rise one day,
> Both solemnly put, in this hole on a Sunday,
> And here rest, *sic transit gloria mundi*.

On December 27, 1733 he wrote a memorandum as a footnote to two lines of verse: "I waked at two this morning with the two above lines in my head, which I had made in my sleep, and I wrote them down in the dark, lest I should forget them. But as the original words being writ in the dark, may possibly be mistaken by a careless or unskilful transcriber, I shall give them a fairer copy, that two such precious lines may not be lost to posterity." Here are the lines:

> I walk before no man, a hawk in his fist;
> Nor, am I a brilliant, whenever I list.

But Ehrenpreis doesn't investigate their deepest moral implications.

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Swift made no effort to collect his poems and little enough effort to publish them. In the most recent "complete" collection,[2] of the 280 poems "just over fifty appeared while Swift was alive." Not since the Elizabethans has there been a poet less mindful of seeing his poems into print; nor did his attitude have anything to do with the times: no poet was ever more mindful of print than his contemporary and friend Pope. Swift wrote poems for himself and for friends, on the spur of the moment: a "loving" couple died within days of each other; or he was stranded for a week on the Welsh coast waiting for a favorable wind to Ireland ("All this is to divert thinking," he notes in his journal between poems); or Stella's birthday came round again ("be not troubled, / Although thy size and years are doubled"); or the scoundrelly Whigs took him to task and he retaliated; or the Duke of Marlborough did the sensible thing and dropped dead ("From all his ill-got honours flung, / Turned to the dirt from whence he sprung"); or he was the victim of an inattentive host ("Who, while I talk, a song will hum, / Or, with his fingers beat the drum"); or, just after extemporizing a poem of twenty-eight lines all ending on the same spondaic rhyme, extemporizes on the same rhyme a poem to his friend Dr. Sheridan (who was himself the first to admit to having a shrewish wife):

> If I write any more, it will make my poor muse sick.
> This night I came home with a very cold dew sick,
> And I wish I may soon not be of an a-gue sick,
> But, I hope I shall ne'er be, like you, of a shrew sick,
> Who often has made me, by looking askew, sick.

Five hundred pages of unconsidered trifles. The dullest of the poems are those represented in anthologies, directly about himself or his imminent death or what his friends think of him or (like "Cadenus and Vanessa") in disingenuous (rather than rash and belligerent) self-justification, where he's on his good behaviour or high horse and the verses begin to labor or are invaded by an alien air of self-pity. His personal goddess was "la Bagatelle," and the best of his poems are bagatelles, impromptus, careless effusions he could quickly forget—like the impressive but impenetrable eight-line poem on the reverse side of which, coming across it years later, he wrote, "Verses on I know not what." Johnson says about Swift's poems that

> there is not much upon which the critic can exercise his powers. They are often humorous, almost always light, and have the qualities which recommend such compositions, easiness and gaiety.

[2] JONATHAN SWIFT: The Complete Poems, ed. by *Pat Rogers*. Yale University Press. $45.00; $14.95.

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They are, for the most part, what their author intended. The diction is correct, the numbers are smooth, and the rhymes exact. There seldom occurs a hard-laboured expression, or a redundant epithet; all his verses exemplify his own definition of a good style—they consist of 'proper words in proper places.'

To divide this collection into classes, and show how some pieces are gross, and some are trifling, would be to tell the reader what he knows already, and to find faults of which the author could not be ignorant, who certainly wrote not often to his judgment, but his humour.

Perfectly true; but they're better than that. Swift was one of a kind, and it's in his poems that he's most nearly himself.

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GEORGE KEARNS

Recent Fiction I

THE REWARD OF BOOK-REVIEWING, really its only justification, is the pleasure of discovering a neglected work of extraordinary quality and of having the opportunity to bring it to the attention of a few readers and friends. A dark inversion of that pleasure is the occasional chance one has to warn against some blurbed and publicized danger to public safety. (Example: the much-advertised "novel," *Infante's Inferno*, a complacently obsessed memoir of its creator's active, unremarkable sex life in pre-Castro Cuba, about which I say nothing but avoid it unless you're interested in bruising your sensibility. Which of course many are.)[1] Let's talk about a work that offers intelligence and surprise on every page, Henrik Strangerup's *The Road to Logoa Santa*, a book that should have readers as long as people read, but which, although published half a year before I'm writing, appears to have gone unnoticed in this country.[2] (It will be available next year in an edition published by the Quality Paperback Book Club.) Strangerup's work is an imaginative reconstruction of the life of a once-celebrated man whose reputation has fallen victim, ironically, to survival of the fittest among scientists—the fittest in this case being his almost exact contemporary and rival theorist, Charles Darwin, who affords him brief, respectful nods ("that excellent observer") in *The Voyage of the Beagle* and *The Descent of Man*. His name is in no reference work in my local library, except for an aging *New Century Cyclopedia of Names*, where one may read: "Lund, Peter William. b. at Copenhagen, June 14, 1801; d. at Logoa Santa, Minas Gerais, Brazil, May 5, 1880. Danish naturalist." Behind that skeletal entry lies an extraordinary life, one that took Strangerup's genius to match with sympathetic curiosity, and his art to shape and re-imagine as boldly and beautifully as he has done.

As a young scientist, Lund spent three years in Brazil in the late 1820s, a time and place when it seemed that a collector had only to take a walk to return with discoveries:

> Every stone he picks up at the beach, when the incoming tide permits a seaside excursion, is covered with a foam-like substance always differing in consistency, color, shape, and structure. His study of these colonies of small organisms is like an enchantment.

[1] INFANTE'S INFERNO, by *G. Cabrera Infante*. Harper & Row. $18.95.
[2] THE ROAD TO LAGOA SANTA, by *Henrik Strangerup*. Marion Boyars. $14.95.

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> He can hardly imagine a painting lovelier than these rocky basins whose crystal clear waters appear in the vertical searing sun more transparent than air itself. Their walls are carpeted several inches thick with small creatures of the purest hues from azure and scarlet to orange and vermilion, and whose floor is ornamented with thickets of algae and corals.

Lund returned to Europe in 1829, with a reputation based on his early papers and collections, completed his doctorate, and associated with the continent's eminent scientists and intellectuals, including the great von Humboldt, who directed him back to Brazil. "Once again," it seemed clear to Lund, "Providence, spoken through the mouth of von Humboldt!" In 1832 he returned to Brazil, settling eventually in the remote interior village of Lagoa Santa, where his work inexplicably came to a halt in 1845. He died there thirty-five years later, Europe having become for him a matter of letters, books, an ideal, and an occasional distinguished visitor who had made the long journey on muleback to pay homage to the famous, but now silenced, scientist. (The visitors had to put up at Lagoa Santa's primitive tavern, waiting for days before Dr. Lund might agree to see them, and sometimes were sent away without an audience.)

Near Lagoa Santa Lund had come upon extraordinary caves filled with a treasure—the preserved bones of unknown races of extinct, gigantic creatures. Ten industrious years were spent digging, studying, cataloguing, trying out theories to account for these unaccountable beasts and the unaccountable ages in which they lived, and shipping both bones and theories back to Europe. The last bones prepared for shipment, the first great phase of his work completed, Lund was packed and ready to return to civilization. Then something happened. "Something was wrong," a Danish nephew remembered years later, "something which he glimpsed over there but did not mention in his letters." Strangerup's novel begins as Lund makes a solitary, ceremonial farewell visit to his caves. He has lived under Providence, certain that all is controlled by Divine Will, that in all events of his life in Brazil "there has been a profound truth, a coherence woven of the finest threads," that "the detail leads to the whole as the whole leads to insight into the Creator's Plan. . . . in which the goal is attained in the realm of Freedom and Reason; the realm of Man." Now suddenly the beloved cave presents a physically and mentally painful and paralyzing anti-version of "strange nameless larvae struggling not to be sucked down into the black depths. Nothing is revealed. Everything is chance and darkness is the master of the universe." Strangerup's presentation of the mysterious event, in which the cave speaks in signs beyond the interpretation of Reason, rivals another piece of bravura writing about a similar experience, that of Mrs. Moore in the Malabar caves

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of *Passage to India*. Dr. Lund never returned to Europe. Thirty-five years in Lagoa Santa lay ahead, years in which he struggles to recover or reconstruct a language that had forced or enabled him all his life to suppress or flee in panic from manifestations of wildness, disorder and evil, and that led him to reject Darwin's solution to the very problems he had been working on. The *Origin of Species*, which arrived at Lagoa Santa about fifteen years after Lund's glimpse into the heart of darkness, was glanced at and shelved forever, as a work

> which may give rise to all sorts of mischief, which perceives struggle and destruction where the Creator's order and harmony ought to prevail, which can unleash a new morality excusing all evil, postulating that the weak exist in order to be crushed by the strong. Doesn't Darwin believe in anything at all? . . . Does he derive aesthetic pleasure from the vision of one vast everlasting bloodbath?

(The young Darwin, too, although Lund did not know it, had been disturbed by the *tristes tropiques*, and resolved never to return. "I thank God," he wrote, recalling his departure for England, "I shall never again visit a slave country." Vivid memories of extremes of cruelty and repression provoke an extraordinary passage at the end of *The Voyage of the Beagle*, although, thinking of misery at home, he seems to beg an essential question with a subjunctive: "If the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin." He remained safely in his study in England, compiling his disturbing vision from thousands of facts, including a few compiled years before by Dr. Lund, who was struggling to attain another vision, privately, in a remote Brazilian town.)

Strangerup has placed Lund's eccentric life within a context of European thought, a web of competing languages from Romantic literature, Enlightenment philosophy, theology, the politics of revolution, and a science that posited harmony and progress. He recreates brilliantly a time in the history of science when a lone investigator like Lund could have to himself a territory that today would be parceled out to hundreds, and in which so much unaccountable data might appear so paratactically that all one could do to make sense of it was make up stories about it. The life of frontier Brazil, in all its otherness from the civilization that meant so much to Dr. Lund, is vividly imagined: the wildness of the slaves at Carnival; a grotesquely provincial "society" party in Rio, where all the guests, to Lund's horrified eyes, are whited sepulchres; the difficulties of travel and communication, of conducting meticulous European science in the isolation of the forest; the daily life of Lagoa Santa, where priest and witch doctor thrive, while just down the road a world-famous intellectual struggles against chaos and insanity in an eccentrically over-structured household. Strangerup's prose moves effort-

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lessly from a neutral ground of reportage into all the modes required by his complex vision of the interaction between the world and the individual, retaining a respectful refusal to coarsen by psychologizing the ultimate mystery of an individual life. On the final page he shifts into an inspired imagining of Dr. Lund's triumphant funeral. The witch doctor drops seven parrot feathers into the grave, and the town of Lagoa Santa bursts—as Dr. Lund wanted it to do, and left money to encourage—into a three-day fiesta, which gets a bit out of hand, or opens at least into the wildness Lund spent a lifetime avoiding, when it is lit by fireworks wrapped in pages of the European mind, torn from books in the Doctor's library.

Unable to read Danish, need I say, I have to sense Strangerup's prose through Barbara Bluestone's excellently-written translation, which seems to be in an English that exists only for this book, one which we will never hear again. Not that it is odd or unidiomatic, rather that it seems so fused with the pacings, perspectives, reticences and revelations of *this* telling that it becomes its own dialect of feeling. Bluestone's English has undoubtedly profited from what T. S. Eliot called a "cross" with another tongue. At any rate, *The Road to Lagoa Santa* gives the reader language that is not boring.

Nadine Gordimer's *Something Out There* is a collection of nine short stories and the title piece, a long novella that might have had greater impact if published separately.[3] Gordimer is a writer of political fiction whose assurance has become finer with time. Her South Africa is a country torn apart not by "racial problems" or "terrorism," but by what she wants us to know is nothing less than civil war. Lush patches of safety in this battlefield are supported by a "grand illusion," and are under attack from enemies within and without. It is a country from which so many have "skipped"—a word with reverberations: "This one or that has skipped; the laconic phrase contains, for all this generation of South Africans in the know, dumped by their elders with the deadly task of defending a life they haven't chosen for themselves, the singular heritage of their whiteness." This writer is unconcerned with distancing her views by ascribing them, even nominally, to some stand-in or narrator. Nor do drama and conflict have to be devised: they are inherent in a place where everything is visibly dramatic and political, at least to Gordimer's fine eye for detail—every nuance of speech, every choice of dress is necessarily charged with irony. In the title story, for example, Joy, a white revolutionary, is caught in a delicate crisis when she must deal with a black visitor who is capable of blowing the cover she's providing for two black terrorists:

Joy slept in an outsize T-shirt; she put her Indian skirt over it

[3] SOMETHING OUT THERE, by *Nadine Gordimer*. Viking. $15.95.

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and went out into the yard with the right amount of white madam manner, not enough to be too repugnant to her, not too little to seem normal to the former Kleynhans laborer.

—Yes? Do you want something?—

Mild as her presence was, it clamped him by the leg; caught there, he took off his hat and greeted her in Afrikaans.—*Môre missus, môre missus.*—

She changed to Afrikaans, too.—What is it you want here?. . . .

They knew exactly how to lie to each other.

Gordimer supplies some views of the lives and thoughts of her conservative/reactionary fellow citizens, and of the merely bewildered, but the characters she's most interested in, clearly, are those whites who fall within a range closer to her own politics, and the blacks and coloreds whose lives provide not even an illusion of refuge from politics. She is writing for her countrymen today, and for the world today; she is also preserving, in a society where truth is more than ordinarily manufactured and suppressed, a record for the future of what it felt like to be a South African now, of what people said, of how they behaved. It's that part of the record only art can preserve. Gordimer is aware of every problem writing political fiction poses, as she showed in her supportive, but tortured and tortuous recent review of the South African J. M. Coetzee's *The Life and Times of Michael K.*[4] Her own decisions as a writer are clear and, in what she writes, brave. She's willing to sacrifice transcendence. (For the absolute other end of the spectrum of the political novel, see the witty, complex and moving *The Engineer of Human Souls* by the exiled Czech writer, Josef Skvorecky, where the bitter ironies of history lead to political despair.[5]

Finally, and all too briefly, I would like to call attention to a book that can't be of interest to many, but that must be of intense interest to readers who admire the poet, Weldon Kees.[6] *The Ceremony* is a collection of fourteen of his short stories dating from 1934-1945. The selection has been edited and given an excellent introduction, brief and just, by Dana Gioia. Kees was a fine poet, whose reputation is kept alive, I think, mostly among other poets. He had what so few poets have: a great ear for rhythm and phrasing, and a distinctive voice, in spite of echoes of Eliot crossed with the grim insouciance of Kenneth Fearing. Kees's gift for fiction, although several of the short stories were much celebrated in their time, was

[4] *New York Review of Books*, February 2, 1984.

[5] THE ENGINEER OF HUMAN SOULS: AN ENTERTAINMENT ON THE OLD THEMES OF LIFE, WOMEN, FATE, DREAMS, THE WORKING CLASS, SECRET AGENTS, LOVE AND DEATH, by *Josef Skvorecky*. Trans. by Paul Wilson. Knopf. $17.95.

[6] THE CEREMONY AND OTHER STORIES, by *Weldon Kees*. Ed. by *Dana Gioia*. Graywolf Press. $14.00.

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nowhere in the league with his gift for verse. Readers familiar with his sophisticated urban poems will find a very different writer here, in part because all the stories reflect Kees's roots in small-town Midwestern life. He didn't remember that small-town life very fondly, to be sure, and what we find here is a series of sardonic vignettes in the tradition of the American grotesque most directly represented by Sherwood Anderson, but without the soppy prose that makes Anderson almost unreadable today. Kees was a very *tight* writer; his economy served his verse well, if it somewhat cheated his fiction. Four additional Kees stories, as well as four included by Gioia, were reprinted last year in *Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Prose* (1983, number 8), edited with a brief, valuable introductory comment by James Reidel and Timothy Nolan. Both publications are a service to the memory of this artist who died too young for his multiple talents fully to be realized.

ALICE BLOOM

Recent Fiction II

UPDIKE, MAILER, BELLOW—NOT HOUSEHOLD GODS, there may never again be any of those, but at least household names. And if not actually *read* in most households, insofar as households these days read at all rather than view, the three are nevertheless widely known as "major," as "major contemporary American writers," and their books, so many of them by now, appear regularly, make a flap and a showing, jump to bestseller and book club lists, are quick to be reviewed, chatted and argued about, assigned in classrooms, eventually encased in the labors of literary theorists, and are "major" as well in the low, concrete way that the three authors have such faces, have for so much and long been "visible" as contemporary American mugs. Even if they haven't read anything since *Rabbit, Run* or *Seize the Day* in English 231 someplace, most adult consumers know what these authors look like: one peeking out from the page, all point, *moue*, and oh gee whiz; one bashed, felled, suffused with rough, hot knowing, much more than you or me; one

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with a smile a mother could long for, but distant somehow, around the wrinkling almond eye.

As the reviewer here, I want to confess at once that I haven't known much more about any of these three beyond updated publicity photos for the past several years, which is to say, I haven't been reading their books. Even when I did read them carefully, dutifully, in order to take exams on The Modern Short Novel, I secretly thought them boring in the undergraduate sense of finding little in any of it relevant to me and a new hunger for explanation. As far from milking cows and grinding swedes as I was, and remain, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, to name just one major old thing, mattered a thousand times more as explanation of the world.

It still does. Since those days of narrow excitement and the need for conscientious preparation for mid-terms finally lifted, my taste has continued to settle elsewhere than on "major contemporary American writers" most of whom have seemed tedious, inessential, uninformative, either puffed-up or anorexic in style but at any rate unbeautiful, beside the ongoing complex point of life, unloving, inattentive, cold pussycats all. Power—the dangerous power to observe, describe, unsettle, renew, connect, make all things quicken including the word *and* the reader, and not, so to speak, just diddle around—that power, in one of those terrible world mood-swings seemed, and seems, to have gone elsewhere. Elsewhere I went to a love of forms other than fiction; back again, rereading and reteaching the old novels; onto the new fiction from other parts of the world; and always, faithfully, in the night hours of indulgence, with the odd, the off-beat, the "minor," the wonderful tough also-rans: Waugh, Dinesen, Anthony Powell, Elizabeth Taylor, M. F. K. Fisher, Giono, Georges Bernanos, just name anyone of any time of either sex who doesn't write out of lunar cramps, mid-life crisis, minor woes, and major ambition.

Given all this, I was excited to do this review, to give "major" and "American" a fresh look. Padded bags of handsome expensive ($15.95! $16.95!) books arrived, books I probably never would have bought, or read, never chatted, argued or lectured about, and a long summer to read and handle them. But what a stiff neck, what a tired jaw, what a chill I have caught; how disappointed and bored, how irritated with that boredom, how hungering and thirsting after old righteousness I have felt. We've all had this experience: we'll go all day without sustenance, if need be, just to avoid the office bore who monopolizes the drinking fountain or the Mr. Coffee. Anything not to get caught by that godforsaken voice, right? Reading is so visceral for me that I'd now and then catch myself, this summer, picking one of the three[1] books up real quickly in hopes that the

[1] THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK, by *John Updike*. Alfred A. Knopf. $15.95. TOUGH GUYS DON'T DANCE, by *Norman Mailer*. Random House. $16.95. HIM WITH HIS FOOT IN HIS MOUTH, by *Saul Bellow*. Harper & Row. $15.95.

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narrative voice wouldn't have had time to get to them from his busybody desk. Maybe, if I move fast enough, I'll get to the story ahead of the narrator, I'd be magically thinking. Just a sip before he catches my ear, just a half cup of coffee.

Something good happened this morning and so far you've heard only a rumble of it. Miss X did and Mr. Y said about it, and what's more, and then Miss X, in tears evidently, went straight into Ms. Z's office and she said, and then. Now, fueled by motives of pure clean nosiness, *that* nevertheless, enlarges our scope of the world, which is to say other people in action, feeling this, saying such, doing that, and we want to know who, why, when, where, how come, and then what happened. We're all mechanics of various engines: cars, dirty dishes, broken bones, filing systems, modern American novels, what have you, but "once upon a time" sets us all on edge, and that truth binds us—to ourselves, to each other, to the word and to the world. I would, I mean this sincerely, defend to the death Edward Said's right to be nosy first and foremost. Is Angel Clare going to find Tess's letter in the morning? And if he does, what will he think, or do? or do to her? and what will Tess then feel, feel about life? Further: no matter how many novels we have read, no matter our mechanic's credentials and up-to-date expertise, no matter, unless we are most strictly, consciously doing a reading in order to formulate an accurate statement about Hardy's craft, we do *not* read about that letter going under Angel's door and think about Hardy, the craftsman, at all. Certainly we are not pressed, in the heat of reading and caring, to think: well, and what clever thing is Hardy going to say now?

The thing about the water-fountain bore is this: he'll use anything, anybody to get your ear, attention, time. He acts as though he wants to be informative, amusing, chummy; he's lonely, you tell yourself, but probably he means well. But every time, the more, the faster he talks, the more of your undivided face he demands, the more you suspect a hidden agenda of telling. He doesn't mean entirely well. It's true he knows all about Miss X's scene this morning with Y and Z; he always knows the corruscations of the latest; he's good at overhearing, snooping, filtering, shaping, predicting, he can author it for you. But tics in his style, his rhythms, his delays, in the tell-tale returns to spotlight and downstage hamming, make you realize he's more keen on describing his description than he is interested in the story, more intent, much more, upon eliciting your curiosity, sympathy, and admiration for himself.

What we resent more, however, and closer to the source of our boredom is this: he makes us bored with ourselves. We turn clumsy and blockish because what he wants—mute attention, rote signals of appreciation, mere admiration—is much less fine a human response than what we are willing and prepared to give to the content of Miss X and the scene with Y and Z. We're bored because, although he seems to want exorbitant amounts from us, he actually wants

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very little. Deep down, the bore does not care for Miss X, or for us, and he does not love the office gossip. He hates it because he fears it will take some crude nourishment away from him. In short, the storyteller's magic here is black: he tells the story in order to kill it.

We learn in the Sunday *New York Times* book section of September 2nd, 1984, that although John Updike has four studies, one with an easy chair, one with a word processor, etc., he wrote *The Witches Of Eastwick* at a wooden desk by hand in soft pencil because "fiction . . . is so intimate, chancy and precarious that it requires the silence of a pencil." Had he said "I wrote *The Witches Of Eastwick* with a number nine Bernat knitting needle dipped in the heart's beating blood of angora kittens, liberal theologians, and maiden librarians," I wouldn't, now that I've read the book, be surprised. Do not be misled by the high-toned maroon dust jacket with its tasteful, elevating Dürer etching: this novel is intended to be a cute, playful romp. In actuality, however, it is a book of such hysterical meanness it seems that only the victim of a prolonged evil spell could have endured the writing of it. From coy and turgid beginning to flat end, it is malicious cliché tarted up as sniggering, smart humor. Was it written with an eye on a female audience? Because real men don't smirk? Real women don't either. Lest someone bristle up like a Halloween cartoon suspecting only anti-feminist fun and vileness here, it might be some relief to know that everyone in the novel of whatever sex is equally empty, vulgar, uninteresting, forlorn, and nasty.

Witches, small town uproar, orgies in hot tubs, a fat cat of a Devil, tricks and endless treats, what could be dull about all this? I'm tempted, imitating the tongue-in-cheekness of the reigning humor of the book, to reply: God only knows; but I won't. It's dull because it's unrelentingly vicious. It's dull because only one voice, that of the narrator, has anything even remotely interesting to say. That voice, vaguely identified twice as "one of us in Eastwick," is the only presence that thinks, feels, notices, knows something about damned near anything, and gets to strut its verbal stuff. On top of that, this voice continually drags attention—for a long lyrical peroration on beach pebbles, or clouds, or trees in autumn, or Bach's cello intricacies, or the history of Rhode Island—*away* from the characters, so that you have a sense of the character trying to escape into his own being but held by the neck and drowned like a tree-toad in a boiling brew, and you realize, in case you'd forgotten, that the real MoJo in novels is words, after all, and the narrative voice is given the best and by far the most of those.

Third it's dull because, honest, nothing happens but the usual tedium, pissy small talk, hypocrisy, gossip, sleeping around, heaps of self-justification, and the shallow hell on earth that has come, by now, to constitute Updike's New England village life. The setting

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this time is Rhode Island, elaborately, incessantly pushed as a place of weird power, a "mysterious, crabbed state," "settled by outcasts," abandoned early on by the Puritan fathers to "Quakers and Jews and antinomians and women." In fact, in little Eastwick, a "sweetie-pie" of a town, the "air empowered women."

What does the air "empower" these three semi-attractive, semi-talented, semi-middle-aged, divorcées, witches, to do? Get interesting full-time jobs and good baby sitters? big bags of gold? shore up their sagging charms? No. *That's* power, ladies and gents. What they can do is turn ex-husbands into madras plaid placemats and tennis balls into raw eggs; kill squirrels and puppies and, when they really get into it, friends, lovers and neighbors with a glance and some obviously researched hocus-pocus. Aside from casting spells, blabbing on the phone, and enjoying hot-tub orgies at the Devil's mansion, mainly what the witches do is sleep around with stray husbands they feel sorry for. It is mischievously suggested throughout that the witches are instruments of a larger force, nature maybe, that works through them to keep some necessary duality alive. Although all three neglect and abuse their many children, bringing them up on constant t.v., snack food, and slaps, there's implied, just implied, a tired old Earth Mothering image about them, as the men they sleep with ("I just wanted to give him something, and I'm all I have") are the men they most pity ("I *can't* be rejecting to him every time, he's too pa*thet*ic").

What's further hinted at is that all the victims of the coven roundly deserved being ground to dust or tripped on the ice or riddled with cancer: that woman was just too uppity, this husband a wimp and a jackass, that lover a sad, sick drunk with whiskey breath, a partial plate, and a big-mouthed wife who deserved to belch thumbtacks, dirty straw, parrot feathers, and finally to be bludgeoned with a poker. Besides this, life is dull, dull, dull in Eastwick where the citizens plod through their "civic and Christian duties." As if that weren't enough, there's the bad times: widespread moral disintegration and all that, crappy values, "window-trashing LSD-imbibing youth," hang-dog Unitarian ministers turning historical site sanctuaries into soup kitchens for draft dodgers, waitresses with varicose veins in mini-skirts, village shops run by "fags" and "Armenians" and a Yapping Fox Wee Giftie with "decoupage by the handicapped," "vanilla plastic vibrators . . . in city drugstore windows" and other such sour, heartless, facile observations made in the interest of establishing the feckless mood of the times, in this case with about as honest and useful results as you'd get taking someone's pulse by checking the labels in their clothes. Collectibles as Zeitgeist.

The dialogue is as meagre and utilitarian as the stuff we overhear at the checkout counter: is that a new skirt? *God,* I'm tired of canning tomatoes. Can't make it sweeties, got to feed the brats. You

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look great, you've lost weight! Well, maybe just a half a drink more. You know what I mean?

Most of it on the phone, too. The witches can cause storm, withering, chaos, murder, no matter—there's no looking into that on their parts, they don't know or care why they can do it, just a bemused acceptance and an ooooh, aren't we devils humor. No wondering, nothing learned, no psychology of magic, and I *think* there's supposed to be an extended joke in this along the lines of see, they're just your average, etc., just like you basically, same little nagging doubts and worries. Put forth as funny because so typical, these women are dull, ignorant, horny, sloppy, petty, bored single parents trying to make both ends wearily meet who just happen to be able to do, as a kind of accidental side-line, dark, dirty, and ultimately dismal deeds.

Tough Guys Don't Dance is not mean. The sins it commits, in style, form, and content, are of the warmer sort—gluttony, sloth, lechery, a perpetual inebriated muddle—but it's not cold, has, in fact, the usual Mailer profligacy and messy generosity about it. A warm mess, then, and for what it's worth, I did like it best of the three.

November in Provincetown is the setting, but no Yapping Fox gift shop or chamber music nights at the Unitarian Church in Mailer's New England: cold dunes, empty streets, fuggy bachelor kitchens stocked with whiskey and instant coffee, and bars, "dark, and just dirty enough to make you comfortable." Lots of working-class types figure as background: fishermen, cops, dope-dealers, handymen, barmaids, tough guys and, as usual, tougher dames, dead and alive, for like Eastwick, Provincetown too (are we seeing a wave of nouveau Gothic lapping our way?) is noisily haunted by the sailors, slatterns, and witches of long ago "Hell Town" across the bay. Makes people crazy, makes them need another drink, all that stuff going through the air, and Tim Madden, the narrator-hero, is not sure for much of the novel whether he's bewitched, besotted, bamboozled, or all of the above.

This uneasy mixture is what might have happened if Malcolm Lowry had written *The House of the Seven Gables*. We'll recognize Madden, we've met him before in Mailer's books: he's a "writer," ex-con, boozer, fighter, womanizer, who has just been deserted by his wife, Patty Lareine. But Madden is a talker first, a heavy duty monologuer, a finder of deep significances, a locater of signs and portents who gathers up dark and darker meaning to his mutterings like an old grandmother rocking. Boasting, confessing, demanding, whimpering, privately mumbling one minute, shouting the next, the kind of guy who hits the Scotch to clear his mind. Mailer writes—or Madden talks?—as though the real opponent were the reader's disbelief, the kind of patient, automatic uh-huh reduction we do to the talk of a drunk who has reached the stage of general paranoia and is trying to convince you it's more real and true than what *you* see and call normal life.

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This novel, advertised as "a murder mystery," is, like the new Updike, supposed to be what's called a "beach book," which is to say, hey, lighten up, will you? This is an entertainment, not *War and Peace*. Don't think! Take it with a grain of sand! Enjoy! All right, I will. As this summer's glossiest whodunit, this novel fails because it's never clear, or at least I can't keep straight, exactly who did do it, who got it, and why. A good mystery, even those of the Miss Marple sort, turns like a lens until it brings the damning specifics into focus. This moves the other way, spreading out like a drop of dye in a bucket of water. As more and more is implicated, less and less makes sense. Finally there are seven corpses, and some of the murders grisly, too—one, then two decapitated heads with long blond hair (his wife? or the women he might have picked up last night? did he?) stuffed in garbage bags and buried in Madden's marijuana patch in Truro, and somewhere at the heart of the crimes is a psychopathic cop, and a screwy real-estate doublecross, and a homosexual ex-roommate from prep school named Meeks Wadley Hilby III who is Madden's ex-wife's ex-husband, and then some colorful natives named Stoodie and Harpo and Bolo, and some of them are dead too, and well, you get the picture. Maybe the story is not supposed to matter and alas, once again, all this is just a vehicle for the Voice, who explains and explains and explains, the last person left at the bar.

One good invention stands out: Madden's dying father, come to visit, who squeezes some good boozy monologues out himself and, in a neat reversal of the sins of the father visited upon the child, is the one in the end who takes six of the bodies, tied to cement blocks, out in the bay in a dinghy and dumps them overboard. For the rest, however, the novel mutters, bumbles and slams along much like the long drunk it describes. You come away with the impression that the reason tough guys don't dance is because they've stood alone in the center of the floor battering themselves into insensibility. Updike's narrator is careful to elude our grasp; Mailer's Madden struggles to reach out and paw us into believing his heightened point of view; and if this voice, too, overwhelms the story, at least it's done in a kind of eager clumsiness, something like an overzealous big dog.

Him with His Foot in His Mouth is five, long, painstakingly crafted stories with pertinent human themes: old people reviewing their lives, young people surviving the deaths of parents, the protean shapes of the thing called love, and work, art, families, good solid stuff. But why is that man smiling? Is he? Stories colder than the wind off the lake down the canyons of Chicago on a January morning. Big, big talk, more disheartening than five winter afternoons in a row at an Ingmar Bergman retrospective. A bitter professor emertius of many disciplines with an I.Q. in the hundreds, a product of the streets, a memory that hasn't slipped a detail, so tied up in knots of cerebration the reader can't do anything for him but

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marvel that his heart still beats. A someone, who tells every story, whose own voice is closest to the bone, the best, most real, only real, only realistic sound in an otherwise silent world, whose voice goes out to the edges of the plain and slaps there in space. Expert, street-wise, manly, cruel, hard and pure, a science beyond us like architectural drawings for the city of the future in which are sometimes placed, like a nod to a passing acquaintance, one small tree and one tiny man in a business hat. Someone who writes using everything he owns like a multimillionaire miser who spreads out his gold behind a steel grille and bullet-proof glass in a well-lighted window on a crowded street in a poor neighborhood where we live. Invited to look all we like, and wish for, but just look, poor folks, no touching. Is it real? What's it to you. As Virginia Woolf said about *Babbitt*, it is all so "masterly, self-assured, and confident."

By why the glass and grille? Why are we not good enough to feel for, handle these characters? A sample from "What Kind Of Day Did You Have," a long story in which a sort of simple woman (Bellow is awfully skillful at creating simple women) is running hard and fast to keep up with an "aging lion of the art world," as the bookjacket calls him. He, Victor Wulpy, talks like this: "Trina, I was disturbed by some discoveries I made about my invitation from the Executives Association." And she, Trina, asks: 'What is this about the Executives?" And he, Wulpy, replies:

> 'I found out that a guy named Bruce Beidell is the main adviser to the speakers committee, and it turns out that he was the one who set up the invitation, and saw to it that I'd be told. He knows I don't like him. He's a rat, an English Department academic who became a culture politician in Washington. In the early Nixon years he built big expectations on Spiro Agnew; he used to tell me that Agnew was always studying serious worthy books, asking him for bigger and better classics. Reading! To read Beidell's mind you'd need a proctoscope. Suddenly I find that he'll be on the panel tonight, one of the speakers. And that's not all. It's even more curious. The man who will introduce me is Ludwig Felsher. The name won't mean much to you, but he's an old old-timer. Before 1917 there was a group of Russian Immigrants in the U.S. and Lenin used some of these people after the revolution to do business for him—Armand Hammer types who made ingenious combinations of big money with Communist world politics and became colossally rich. Felsher brought over masterpieces from the Hermitage to raise currency for the Bolsheviks. Duveen and Berenson put in a cheap bid for those treasures.' Victor had been personally offended by Berenson and detested him posthumously.

To which Trina replies:

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"So you're in bad company. You never do like to share the platform."

One more, this time from "Zetland: By A Character Witness." Zetland, Chicago boy ("Yes, I knew the guy. We were boys in Chicago. He was wonderful"), *Yeshiva Bukkur* writ large as possible, "encouraged to be a little intellectual," he is

> a junior Immanuel Kant. Musical (like Frederick the Great or the Esterhazys), witty (like Voltaire), a sentimental radical (like Rousseau), bereft of gods (like Nietzsche), devoted to the heart and to the law of love (like Tolstoy). He was earnest . . . but he was playful, too. Not only did he study Hume and Kant but he discovered dada and surrealism as his voice was changing. The mischievous project of covering the great monuments of Paris in mattress ticking appealed to him. He talked about the importance of the ridiculous, the paradox of playful sublimity. Dostoyevsky, he lectured me, had it right. The intellectual (petty bourgeois-plebeian) was a megalomaniac. Living in a kennel, his thoughts embraced the universe. Hence the funny agonies. And remember Nietzsche, the *gai savoir*. And Heine and the "Aristophanes of Heaven." He was a learned adolescent, was Zetland.

I *guess*. No matter that we know hardly any adolescent who even knows what "mattress ticking" is much less enough to ask the questions "Had Lenin really expected democratic centralism to work within the Bolshevik party? Was Dewey's argument in *Human Nature and Conduct* unassailable? Was the 'significant form' position fruitful for painting? What was the future of primitivism in art?" I mean, imagine one of these at the supper table!

Later, having "studied logic under Carnap and later with Bertrand Russell and Morris R. Cohen," then moving on to "semiotics, symbolic logic," reading "Tarski, Carnap, Feigl, and Dewey," he marries, you guessed it, a simple woman. Here he is, explaining to her his excitement over discovering *Moby Dick*:

> "Oh, Lottie, it's a miracle, that book. it takes you out of this human world."
>
> "What do you mean, Zet?"
>
> "I mean it takes you out of the universe of mental projections or insulating fictions of ordinary social practice or psychological habit. It gives you elemental liberty. What really frees you from these insulating social and psychological fictions is the other fiction, of art. There really is no human life without this poetry. Ah, Lottie, I've been starving on symbolic logic."
>
> 'I've *got* to read that book now," she said.
>
> But she didn't get far with it. Sea books were for men, and any-

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way she wasn't bookish; she was too impulsive to sit long with any book. That was Zet's department. He would tell her all she needed to know about *Moby Dick*.

A long careful study of these and other stories by Bellow might turn up the theory that these tales are parables about a captive man, overintellectualized and undercivilized, a member of MENSA (except that he isn't, he scorns clubs), who slurps at the table his mother has set with smelly food. (There are, dropped here and there, references to "Kaddish," but why Ginsberg can't be harnessed in as lending some heat to these stories is somebody's Ph.D. thesis, not mine.) This young man's book bag is about to burst; his posture is bad; he hates. What he loves, no woman will ever know. The Wandering Jew of all times, in this context, he will never come into the ease of a culture because he's wrong about what it is: he didn't need to learn first, as he decided he did, all of its words. Words was not it, was only the first step; was not being at home as a human.

While reading these books this summer, I have put myself through a second unprofitable exercise: assuming these books will eventually have world-wide translation and distribution, what will readers in Managua, or Prague, or Little Loose Chippings, Dorset, think about us over here in the new world via our "major, contemporary" writers? Updike's devil says at one point, "People don't terrifically mind, being ripped off, is something I've discovered over the years." A demonic point of view, yes, but one that is apparently shared by a great many people putting pen, pencil, and word processor to paper these days. I do mind, however, and I have written this in the trust that others might, too.

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MONROE K. SPEARS

Unmistakably American, in Ambidexter Matherese

I SUSPECT THAT MANY PEOPLE have the same impression of Cotton Mather that I had before reading this book:[1] that the only interesting question about him was whether he was more boring than he was repulsive. An embarrassing ancestor, about whom one is not eager to learn more. But in this full-length portrait against a fully-painted background, he emerges as still repulsive, but anything but boring: a complex figure, full of contradictions and paradoxes, of great interest psychologically and historically. He was a child prodigy: though entering Harvard at eleven was in those days not nearly as impressive as it would be now—the total student body numbered only twenty, and at one point was reduced to three—it was remarkable. (Katherine Anne Porter says "his mind at fourteen had reached the limit of its growth. . . . He was a typical wonder-child.") He was a stammerer (parental pressures have rarely been more obvious!) who became a great preacher. A Puritan of the Puritans, he went from witch-hunting to campaigning for inoculation against smallpox (leagued with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, though unbeknownst to that most unlikely bedfellow). Always eager to be first, he goes all the way from being a theocratic Puritan to being a more or less ecumenical and tolerant benevolist and proto-scientist, interested in common-sense practical measures to alleviate human misery and in formulating a minimum basis on which most Christians might agree.

He was America's first intellectual to gain international recognition—and terribly insecure and provincial about it, professing humility with insistent self-assertion, rushing into print at the slightest provocation (388 titles to his credit), parading his D. D. and F. R. S. on all his later title pages, hoping, like any anxious modern academic, to avoid perishing by extensive publishing. (His motives were the same, too: to establish status and convince himself of his own worth—also his father, Increase, who was not convinced and thought that he shouldn't publish so much).

Silverman's central theme is that Cotton Mather was the first conspicuously American writer, the first person "to write at length about the New World having never seen the old. Much of his career illustrates, for the first time, the costs and gains to America's intellectual and artistic life of its divorce from Europe. These costs and

[1] THE LIFE AND TIMES OF COTTON MATHER, by *Kenneth Silverman*. Harper & Row. $29.95.

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gains have been one and the same—a lack of standards or a freedom to create (depending on how it is viewed) which has often inspired works tainted by provincial crabbedness, eccentricity, and overreaching, but also often distinguished by their close kin, pungency, innovation, and grandeur. . . . In his curiousness, epic reach, and quirkily ingenious individualism he was nevertheless the first unmistakably American figure in the nation's history."

It is true that even now, in Imperial America, we can see in ourselves the pushy insecurity of Cotton Mather, at once self-assertive and self-deprecatory. In Mather, this uncertain sense of identity is manifested also in an uncertain and fluctuating acceptance of the general historical shift from the self-conception of the Puritans as Saving Remnant or New Israel to that of New England as a loyal part of the British Empire. In religion, this historical shift is from the early arrogant and exclusive theocracy that tortured and executed even Quakers ("for the first intrusion, loss of an ear; for the second, loss of the second ear; for the third, a hot iron through the tongue; for repeated intrusions, death: in the early 1660s three incorrigible Quakers were hanged") to a more tolerant and ecumenical religion, professing Congregationalism as merely one among many valid religions (though not all; Mather always excluded Catholics and, of course, all non-Christians) and rejecting force in religious matters. (Mather, always clamoring to be first, claimed to be the first to testify "against the Suppression of Heresy, by Persecution"; "Despite his cries about the devil reclaiming a uniquely sanctified New England for his own, in the decade following the trials he continually proclaimed that New Englanders were not a special purified remnant but were, above all, loyal colonial Englishmen.")

As David Levin well says, in the introduction to his edition (1966) of Mather's *Bonifacius*, we modern Americans "continue to say, with the author of *Bonifacius*, that the ways of honest men are simple and the ways of the wicked are subtle, but we seek to devise a similar ingenuity for doing good around the world. We may also find it especially interesting that Mather the American, unlike his English predecessor Richard Baxter, says not a word about the danger that our efforts to do good may lead to disaster." The great change discussed above, according to many intellectual historians, coincides with the beginning of the modern world, which Paul Hazard dated specifically 1715. So we may think of Cotton Mather as not crucified (though he would have loved this figure) but caught between, or awkwardly bent over, the intersection of two great epochs, the Great Divide of modern history.

Why is Cotton Mather so repulsive? His father, Increase, with all his faults—his sour, depressive disposition, his open preference for England—is much more attractive. In the Salem trials, Increase was more concerned to prevent innocent persons from disgrace or hanging than to put down a diabolic conspiracy, whereas Cotton,

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publicly dissenting from his father for the first time, took the opposite view. Perhaps the fundamental trait is Cotton's incessant driving ambition—dominating, overweening, unlimited. As a child he rebuked his playmates "for their wicked *Words* and *Ways*." He dislikes and is contemptuous of blacks, Indians, common people. He intends in his *Biblia Americana* to "interpret all of Scripture in the light of 'all the Learning in the World' "; he spends "three successive days fasting and praying in his study, something he believed had never been done before by anyone"; his whole religious attitude is deeply infected with what we would now call elitism of a peculiarly obnoxious sort. "*Apocalyptical Studies* are fittest for those Raised Souls," he notes with obvious complacency, "whose *Heart-Strings* are made of a Little *Finer Clay* than other mens."

In religious terms, Mather's ambition, competitiveness and insecurity make him an extreme elitist: he is not satisfied to be saved, but wants to be more saved than others. (He seems to forget temporarily the dangers of such Catholic doctrines as the Treasury of Merits and Works of Supererogation that so infuriated Luther and other reformers—as if man could deserve or earn salvation.) He "believed deeply in a hierarchy of the pious, and aspired to join the elite." But in contrast, on the next page he is quoted as "renouncing all Apprehension of Merit, in my own Duties, and relying upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone, for Acceptance and Salvation." Making these "simultaneous calls for openness and exclusiveness" leads him into further exercises in the ambidexter and Matherese. Openness was hard to reconcile with "the distinctive Congregational understanding of the church as an elite group of Saints." The first ceremony he participated in as a minister was excommunication of a woman for drunkenness. His triple conception of heaven in *Tri-Paradisus* was strictly hierarchical; and he thought the literal Second Coming and the end of time were imminent. He was not ambidexter then: preaching on the earthquake six months before his death, "his startlingly oral depiction of a vindictive God speaking in fire and convulsion put before his listeners a lifetime of undernourishment and ill reward, its straining vatic energy a personal cry for last-minute retribution." At the end he was no longer benevolist or tolerant.

His awful addiction to superlatives and to exaggeration is partly responsible for our repugnance: everything is "amazing" or "astonishing." Of course, this style was characteristic of other Dissenters as well as Puritans, and of Grub Streeters and the lower classes generally; no doubt it helps to explain why the British middle and upper classes became so devoted to understatement. The Puritan assumption that God is concerned with every detail of personal life and every petty emotion is equally distasteful; a little of this makes the stiff upper lip understandable and attractive. But these characteristics are superficial and not peculiar to Mather in any case.

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In likeability, as in most respects, Mather forms a strong contrast to, for example, his almost exact contemporary Matthew Prior (1664-1721; Mather's dates are 1663-1728). Prior was an accomplished diplomat and poet, a polished man of the world and perhaps the greatest writer of light verse in English. Mather was apparently one of the worst poets who ever lived; as Silverman says, he had no ear for verse at all. But Prior, in spite of his Montaigneian skepticism, was also tormented by religious doubts and problems; his last (unfinished) poem was a long and agonized debate called *Predestination*. It is a curious fact, too, that the religious poetess Elizabeth Singer, whom Prior briefly courted and wrote verses to, was also briefly courted by Mather's rival Benjamin Colman. Mather's connections, however, were not with the polite world, but rather with such Dissenters as Watts, Defoe (with both of whom he corresponded), and Oldmixon, whose attack on him he bitterly resented. The City Poet, Sir Richard Blackmore, liked his writings, as one might expect. He read Dryden, Waller, Cowley; but oddly enough, there is no mention in Silverman of Bunyan or of the greatest Puritan of all, John Milton. Naturally, there is no mention of Swift, whose *Tale of a Tub* is the greatest satirical portrayal of Mather's kind of religion.

Indians were suspected instruments of the Devil, their "old landlord Satan." Like many others, Mather believed that "the Indians were a satanic parody of the Puritans, the Chosen People of the devil as the Israelites, and then the Puritans, were the Chosen People of God." In missionary efforts as late as 1712, Mather hoped "not to christianize the Indians of New England but, more accurately, to Puritanize them," abhorring the Jesuit and distrusting the Anglican missionaries. It is this adversarial, sectarian attitude that is so offensive in Mather (in spite of ambidexterity): he assumes that the Indians, the French, and the witches are all agents of the Devil in a great conspiracy to subvert the New Israel, and the Catholics and Anglicans are possibly on the Devil's side. This War in Heaven is exciting, like a theological thriller by C. S. Lewis or any good evangelical sermon; but Mather sees enemies everywhere. The contrast with, for example, William Penn, who both assumes and discovers that the Indians are good, uncorrupted and peaceable, is extreme. (Daniel Hoffman's *Brotherly Love* presents an unforgettable picture of Penn's relations with the Indians.) While Mather, as we have seen, moved some distance toward tolerance and quiet in his later years, and emphasized doing good, especially in his *Bonifacius*, which Ben Franklin admired (and gently parodied, with Mather as Silence Dogood), the contrast with Penn is striking. Mather did finally conclude that New England was not going to be a New Jerusalem and went so far as to embrace Quakers; but the tone of his late sermons, as we have seen, is one of impassioned exclusionism (to use the mildest possible term).

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Silverman relies heavily on psychological explanations, which he presents in a sensible and non-doctrinaire fashion. His interpretation of the Salem witches is that demonic possessions prevent psychotic breaks with reality "by affording underlying conflicts expression in a culturally shared idiom"; they "allow inaccessible experiences to be made public and intelligible." The bewitched children "acted out with impunity the worst fears of those ministers who denounced the rising generation for wanting to explore sex, taunt their parents and deride the ministry." He is especially good on Cotton Mather's speech problems, from stuttering (he "fits a widely accepted model of stutterers as 'sensitive' children of overanxious and perfectionist parents") to his "continuing need to allay feelings of smallness and show extraordinary fecundity in producing language"—and, even more psychoanalytically, that the angel who predicted that his lengthening branches would reach Europe "in effect promised him a transatlantic penis"—to his ambidexterity ("he often produced with great labor works at once his own and not his own, the extreme case being of course his 'Biblia Americana,' a gigantic collection of the works and words of others, at once toweringly self-aggrandizing and utterly self-effacing, distinctively by Cotton Mather and not by him at all," and to his final last conversion to silence. At the age of sixty, when his eleventh child died, he preached a sermon later published as *Silentiarius*. "Having given much energetic discipline to mastering his unruly speech, or much ingenuity to denying its quirks by gorgeous fluency, he now took for his doctrine the concept that "Our GOD is never more *Praised* than by our *silence*."

Silverman's book is really exceptionally good, partly because of its magisterial competence as history and biography, partly because of its readability without sacrifice of dignity, but most of all because of Silverman's attitude: he sees Mather sympathetically but does not attempt to defend everything about him—doesn't leap automatically into a defensive posture—nor condemn him, but tries to understand. He doesn't, however, assume that to understand all is to forgive all; he explains his faults, but doesn't try to explain them away. He says what can be said in defense of Mather's writings about the Salem witch trials, but agrees with Mather's opponent Calef that Mather's attitude was at best "perfectly ambidexter." "The defining moods and gestures of Matherese—to give this ambivalence a name—are belligerent courtesy, self-flattering modesty, fretful calm, denigrating compliments, unacceptable offers." He describes his communications to the Royal Society as a "Matherean mixture of snobbery, altruism, resentment, and inquisitiveness." Mather's moral deterioration in his later years ("lying, talebearing, and duplicity") is described without palliation. His final summation of Mather's faults is sympathetic but just: "These his inner fears and historical circumstances make comprehensible but not less disfigur-

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ing. His submissiveness that would not grasp that at Salem people were being legally murdered; his meddlesome ambitiousness that stooped or strutted for petty advancement; his guile that wrote self-promoting letters under others' names; his vanity that scented out lurking slurs yet sensed no provocations in himself; his rashness that tendered spite as amity; his envy that sneered at what it could not get."

Silverman does not, then, attempt to "rehabilitate" Mather, but rather to make him more understandable. To maintain a sympathetic but detached attitude toward Mather, an easy man to dislike but also one who begged to be championed, an obsessive self-justifier who cried out constantly for a defender, is Silverman's most remarkable achievement.

Reluctant though we may be to recognize ourselves in Mather, and impossible though it may be to like him, it is, I think, difficult to resist Silverman's modest thesis that we may see in him many of the qualities that have been characteristic of most American intellectuals since. Mather was a genuine prodigy, capable of astonishing intellectual feats, endowed with a powerful mind and enormous energy. His ambition was unlimited, and was certainly related to his Puritan religion; it was exacerbated by the feelings of insecurity and inferiority that always accompany provincial or colonial status. Though few of us now would oscillate as Mather did from pious humility to preposterous self-assertion, or express our attitudes in ambidexter Matherese, we have our own defenses and our own oscillations that may prove equally revealing to future readers.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

The Crisis in Criticism?

MY TITLE, EXCEPT FOR THE QUESTION MARK, is taken from a new book by an American professor of English at Wellesley College who has set out, ambitiously, to give an account of what he sees as "a woeful lack of system, order, and coherence in English studies, a lack that usually proves shocking to those who teach in other departments."[1] This chaos goes along with the "boom in literary theory" which William Cain thinks has done little, for all its churning out of books and articles, "to alter the basic shape of English studies . . . its shortcomings and deficiencies." Mr. Cain believes furthermore that when English teachers are called upon to justify what they are up to, they do it very badly, in a mood of "anger, perplexity, and embarrassment" under which is concealed "arrogance and uncertainty." So he proposes "acts of self-scrutiny"—such as the book he has undertaken—in order to make us better about justifying our vocation.

The "we," as referring to himself and his colleagues in English departments throughout the land, is central to Mr. Cain's rhetorical vocabulary, and its rather unreflecting use suggests to me that it would have benefitted from some of that scrutiny he is championing. For example, one of his main suggestions is that "we" should think of ourselves not narrowly as "academic teacher-critics" (which I always thought of myself as) but as "intellectual workers." We should conceive of ourselves in this way, employing (in a phrase of Whitman's) "the powerful language of resistance," since "we are prone to take established practices for granted leaving them unexamined and, even worse, defending them as if they were natural and inescapable." "Intellectual work" would involve more "positive terms and standards," would help widen our conception of ourselves beyond that of "close reader" or "theorist." And then perhaps "we" would not be so inclined to say "in embittered moments" that we are "grinding out books and articles while paying no attention to the needs of students, the humanistic mission of our work, and the great tradition of culture."

Evidently it has never occurred to Mr. Cain that we aren't all that solid a "we." He refers to Helen Vendler, who gave the presidential address to the Modern Language Association in 1980, as "our

[1]THE CRISIS IN CRITICISM: Theory, Literature, and Reform in English Studies, by *William E. Cain*. Johns Hopkins University Press. $24.50.

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spokesperson." Did he know that it is possible (I speak from decades of experience) *not* to be a member of that organization, and defer to no "spokesperson" about anything, yet continue to teach English? More seriously, and typical of the irritating plural pronoun, is an assertion like the following:

> Evaluative criticism—a criticism based on the making of judgments and striving for concrete knowledge—has just about disappeared. Texts exist in order for us to write books and essays about them. We do not usually make judgments, nor do we encourage fellow critics and students to believe that some works are more important, more alive in and for our time, than others.

Of course the slippery "just about disappeared" and "do not usually" provide cover for retreat from the bold assertion, but I still think Mr. Cain should speak for himself, since my own teaching consists of little else than encouraging students to make judgments (helping them to get better at so doing) about literary works. Surely I am not alone in this strange practice?

The Crisis in Criticism is an oddly put-together book, so it seemed to me, with opening chapters (Part One) on the literary theory and criticism of E. D. Hirsch, Hillis Miller, and Stanley Fish. Mr. Cain's criticism of them is intelligently directed, but it is hard to see why the three should be accorded such privilege, as if they were central to anything. Then follows Part Two, about the emergence and institutionalization of New Criticism, also intelligent, though little that one has not already encountered in Gerald Graff's work. Part Three, titled "Reviewing the State of Criticism," consists of many short reviews of many critics, and results in an increasingly scattered book, which is not put back together by a conclusion where some suggestions for a "new curriculum" (with "historical investigation" at its center, rather than the teaching of "monuments") are set forth at length. But for all his seriousness and frequent good sense, there is a strain of priggishness in Cain's whole procedure which made me less than eager to sign on as one of his intellectual workers, even while I suppose I'm as dissatisfied with The Profession as the next person. Cain knows what writers—as well as teachers—"should" and should not do: Roland Barthes "ought to have focused his attention" or "should have employed his imaginative energies" in ways different than he did. Literary theorists "should of course work 'creatively,' but they should do so in a style that readers can engage." Tell it to Jacques Derrida, Frederick Jameson and all the other Marines. The New Criticism was a splendid thing, but "we" must not go back to it, to "the endless reading of texts, the disappearance of literature, and the play of impressionism and subjectivity" (Mr. Cain's mind works in tripartite rhythms). "Close reading" is essential, but we must not "define (and thus defend) the

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teaching of literature as, above all, 'close reading' " since that excludes too many other important things.

I ended up unclear about what those other important things were. Mr. Cain doesn't have a particular political line, though at one point he says about Richard Ohmann that "His principled commitment to Marxism is commendable" (why is that? I wondered) and speaks of Ohmann's injunction to teach "with revolution as our end" as "a powerful and courageous affirmation" (my heart did not beat faster). The book's conclusion invites us to seize opportunities, be ready to initiate new programs and reform old ones, respond to students' need for new courses, make our seminars more provocative. Noble sentiments, but with a terribly abstract ring to them. And humorless to boot, as is Mr. Cain's book throughout and not to its credit or the credibility of its proposals.

Reading William Cain and then turning to some collections of essays and reviews by four English writers,[2] three of them present or former academics, one blinks and wonders what happened to the crisis in criticism. For in each case the individual style is an exceptional one, very much outside the orbit of the usual, and not to be imitated. To begin with the nonacademic (just one of the many things he is non), Philip Larkin's collection of pieces includes a number of literary ones, mostly reviews, plus a couple of interviews, the introduction to *All What Jazz* (his gathering of jazz reviews) and some miscellany. It would be a mistake, I think, to demonstrate that Larkin is a good commonsense critic by pointing to his opinions and judgments about such poets as Marvell, Hardy, Dickinson, de la Mare, Owen, Auden and others, although his remarks about them are invariably fresh and to the point. Who else, for just one example, has pointed out about the fifth stanza of Marvell's "Garden" (the one with all those fruits) how "the paradisal lushness of the garden is made so overwhelming, with a hint of menace in the independently acting fruit, and a touch of the ludicrous in the Hulot-like figure of the speaker (conked on the head with apples, hit in the face by a bunch of grapes, and finally sprawling full length over a melon)" . . . Surely the fun of this lies in the original language Larkin calls up ("conked on the head") in response to Marvell's own originality. He likes to play around in his required writing, after business hours have ended at the University Library in Hull.

The playing around is especially notable when he's being interviewed. Ask this librarian what he likes reading, and you are invited to admire the capaciousness of his interests: "I read everything ex-

[2] REQUIRED WRITING: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982, by *Philip Larkin*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $17.95; $9.95. COLLECTED ESSAYS: The Englishness of the English Novel, Vol. I, by *Q. D. Leavis*. Cambridge University Press. $44.50; $15.95. SELECTED ESSAYS, by *John Bayley*. Cambridge University Press. $42.50; $15.95. THE FORCE OF POETRY, by *Christopher Ricks*. Oxford University Press. $29.95.

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cept philosophy, theology, economics, sociology, science, or anything to do with the wonders of nature, anything to do with technology—have I said politics?" Why does he live in Hull? Because "it's so far away from everywhere else . . . I love all the Americans getting onto the train at King's Cross and thinking they're going to come and bother me, and then looking at the connections and deciding they'll go to Newcastle and bother Basil Bunting instead." Wouldn't he like to visit, say, China? "I wouldn't mind seeing China if I could come back the same day." Doesn't he feel a need to be more at the center of things? "Oh no, I very much feel the need to be on the periphery of things." But how about the theatre? "I count it as one of the great moments of my life when I first realized one could actually walk out of a theatre." (Am I enjoying myself, he asked, during the interval of a performance of *Playboy of the Western World*, and the answer came back—"No, I've never watched such stupid balls," upon which he departed the scene.) Why not go to America? "I'm so deaf now that I shouldn't dare. Someone would say, What about Ashbery, and I'd say, I'd prefer strawberry, that kind of thing."

Frost once said that he would no more set out in pursuit of the truth than he would in pursuit of a living, unless he were mounted on his prejudices. Larkin makes a life out of not setting out in pursuit of anything, but is nevertheless firmly mounted on his prejudices. On whether you find them, as I do, invigorating and quite delightful, or as two American reviewers (Robert Pinsky, David Bromwich) found them, rather less than delightful, will depend how indispensable a book you take *Required Writing* to be. Larkin's prejudices about poetry—it must give pleasure, and it comes from personal, non-literary experience—are likely to give offense to academic lovers of intertextuality. And then there is the philistine insularity (is it?) which insists that foreign languages are "irrelevant": "If that glass thing over there is a window, then it isn't a *Fenster* or a *fenêtre* or whatever. *Hautes Fenêtres*, my God! A writer can have only one language, if language is going to mean anything to him" ("Poetry is what gets lost in translation"—Frost). Foreign writers are irrelevant too, as in Larkin's response to the name Borges ("Who is Jorge Luis Borges?") or his supposition about Donald Davie's *Sequence for Francis Parkman* that Parkman is "one of [Davie's] American friends, perhaps." David Bromwich finds this "modesty of information" "cloying"; while I think the remarks about Borges and Parkman highly entertaining since—good American that I am—I love to have my country guyed by illiberal Englishmen. And may one suggest that Larkin has perhaps heard of both Borges and Parkman (also knows the French language), therefore can make a clever-dumb confession of ignorance, the better to tease the interviewer, or reviewer.

Best let one's own prejudices come to the fore, so let me declare

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that I don't care if Larkin doesn't know Ashbery from strawberry, or even thinks that Charlie Parker is "joyless" (his contempt for post-thirties jazz is well-known, indeed he won't allow it the name of jazz), since he is eloquent in appreciation of another great American. Recalling his undergraduate days at Oxford where he made friends with Kingsley Amis, Larkin says that "Russell, Charles Ellsworth 'Pee Wee' (b. 1906) clarinet and saxophone player extraordinary, was, *mutatis mutandis*, our Swinburne and our Byron. We bought every record he played on that we could find, and—literally—dreamed about similar items on the American Commodore label." (I wonder if he has a recording of Russell's with Muggsy Spanier—"I'd Climb the Highest Mountain"?) At any rate, *Required Writing* should be acquired, if not required.

There is no natural transition from Philip Larkin to Q. D. Leavis, who I think would have had little to say to each other (there is a paucity of amusing remarks in the first volume of her collected essays). But she is as stubborn, indeed as prejudiced as the man from Hull, and just as much a practicer of that evaluative criticism William Cain finds to have disappeared from the current scene. Mrs. Leavis's essays are all about the English novel and English novelists, half the volume dealing with Jane Austen—her well-known "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings," plus introductions to *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*, plus a late lecture, "Jane Austen and a Changing Society." Yet I found even more stimulating her essays on *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, neither of which essay I'd read, and both of which are splendid introductions to and appreciations of Charlotte Brontë's novels. The claim for Brontë as a great prose writer; a comparison of *Jane Eyre* with *The Mill on the Floss*; a passing contrast of *Villette* with highly-structured novels like *The Magic Mountain*, *Jude the Obscure*, or *The Custom of the Country*—these were but a few of the challenging formulations which are "exploratory-creative" in the sense F. R. Leavis employed that term.[3]

In his introduction to the volume, G. Singh makes an interesting and just comparison of Q. D. Leavis's writing on the novel with that of her husband's, pointing out that for Mrs. Leavis it "was not of primary interest . . . whether a writer was major or not, and she could write as cogently on Mrs. Oliphant as on Dickens, on Charlotte Yonge as on George Eliot, on Edith Wharton as on Henry James." This didn't mean that Q. D. Leavis lacked a sense of "major creativity" in a novelist, but that "the contact between the critic and the writer . . . is made at more varied levels than in that of F. R. Leavis; and the form as well as the degree and proportion in which the social historian and the critic in her combine are also more varied and more manifest." In a sense this could have been predicted

[3] An interesting collection of personal essays about F. R. and Q. D. Leavis has just been published. THE LEAVISES: Recollections and Impressions, ed. by *Denys Thompson*. Cambridge University Press. $34.50.

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on the basis of her *Fiction and the Reading Public*, yet my own sense of her dealings with fiction on these "varied levels," her concern for the sociology of literature, was sharpened in reading these essays on individual writers, as well as the two more general ones which begin and end the book. In "A Glance Backward, 1965" she praises her Cambridge teacher, the Anglo-Saxon scholar H. M. Chadwick, for putting Anglo-Saxon into the cultural and social life of northern Europe; and she goes on as well to praise Leslie Stephen's *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century* for dealing similarly with another body of work.

This social emphasis is important and valuable not just for the enlightenment it brings to the novels she writes about, but because it helps modulate the shrillness and self-righteousness heard in both Leavises but only occasionally in these essays. Only in the final one, "The Englishness of the English Novel," does she find it necessary to deplore the "sub-human" nature of contemporary English novelists, compared with their great predecessors. Then, alas, the names come thick and fast as we are invited to shake our heads over the "commercialized" abdication from "moral responsibility" in Amis and Snow and Powell and Murdoch and Fowles ("railway-bookstall fiction,") and Drabble and Olivia Manning—all of these, along with Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene (also deplored) whom your reviewer reads with pleasure. But it is fine to have Mrs. Leavis's essays collected, and one looks forward to the two further volumes, the second to consist of her pieces on American writers, the final one of unpublished essays, appreciations of nineteenth-century women writers, plus miscellaneous material.

His new book of essays—most of them long reviews, originally, but always issuing in fresh thought—is John Bayley's eighth. From *The Romantic Survival* and *The Characters of Love*, through substantial books on Pushkin and Tolstoy and one about the uses of "division" in literature, to most recently book-length "essays" on Hardy and Shakespeare, he has proven himself to be (along with Christopher Ricks) the most resourceful and original critic of poetry in England. (I except Donald Davie as a transatlantic phenomenon.) But Mr. Bayley writes equally well about the novel, and the present collection is made up of half of pieces on twentieth–century American and English poets, and half on Russian and European writers such as Pushkin, Gogol, Nabokov and Milosz. Bayley is the opposite of the critic who tells you what he's going to do, then proceeds in orderly fashion to do it; indeed there is often the feeling that when he begins his piece he doesn't know exactly where it will end up or how long it will go on. Like R. P. Blackmur, he is a creative improviser, an ad-libber (as Blackmur liked to say) and this means that the reader must be extraordinarily alert to catch the nuances and the moves of his style. (One has to work very hard in reading the books on Hardy and Shakespeare, but they richly repay the effort.)

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Another way of putting it is that Bayley's originality makes sentences end in ways you don't envisage when they begin, like this one about Wallace Stevens:

> The most important thing about Wallace Stevens's poetry is that it seems fastidious, deeply pondered, idiosyncratically exclusive; but that it is really co-operative, communal, impressionistic, and sketchy, a mild show-off before persons who, like those in local church or lecture-hall, are already *au fait* with the preacher's tone.

That remark starts more notions going than do a whole series of earnest explications, by admiring exegetes, of individual Stevens poems.

Mr. Bayley writes interestingly and sympathetically about Stevens, about John Ashbery and other American "poets of reality" (the phrase is Hillis Miller's). But his affections lie more strongly with what he calls "the poetry that is exactly itself," which in our century Frost and Lowell and Berryman and Larkin have written, and of which Keats is the great romantic exemplar—"The Eve of St. Agnes" is Bayley's touchstone for many things. Such poetry "has no need to evade its provenance" (as Stevens and Ashbery and A. R. Ammons evade theirs), Bayley says in writing about Harold Bloom on Stevens

> because the objects in it and the story in it have their own selves which can be like nothing else. The armour of Achilles refuses to dwindle on the road toward meaning and 'reality,' any more than the kidney which that other Bloom, bought to eat for his breakfast, or the exquisite backside which Alisoun projected from the shop-window. The critics poets' . . . cannot provide such objects, or the words which call them into being. The poet of 'reality' is not the poet of real things.

Admittedly Bayley draws the lines rather sharply, and there is sometimes a bit of ex cathedra in his tone. But the tendentiousness is exhilarating and animating, the elegant range of reference powerful, and (speaking for myself) the willingness to hold that there are such things as "real things,"—even as they exist in the words of poets—is salutary.

Invariably there is a twist on the words Bayley himself employs, as they turn an idea in surprising and frequently humorous ways: "The important thing for a poet like Larkin is what he has to say, and if he has nothing to say he is silent. Ashbery, on the contrary, gets going when he has nothing to say. The absence of a theme is what he both starts with and describes." Who would think of comparing Betjeman with D. H. Lawrence? (Answer: John Bayley).

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"Laugh the Betjeman way and the best people will laugh with you. D. H. Lawrence had a comparable power, the jester's vitality that attracts the upper crust, and the social 'feel' in his verse has odd affinities with Betjeman's: both are obviously—in their works and out of them—the life and soul of a 'set.' " Or here—he is finely describing the "presence" of Larkin in his poems:

> His seeming intimacy can be startling and yet he is both shameless and reticent, confidential and yet invulnerably refined, wholly unselfconscious and yet inevitably withdrawn, unavailable to us and yet totally forthcoming, absent in presence. His presence is its own style 'elsewhere.' The interior of his poetry, like a Vermeer interior, is both wholly accessible and completely mysterious.

Or here, commenting on Larkin's juxtapositions in some lines from "Vers de Société"—

> In a pig's arse, friend.
> Day comes to an end.
> The gas fire breathes, the trees are darkly swayed.

"Who but Larkin would juxtapose the exotic obscenity and the romantic line in such a way that instead of their making a brisk, glib contrast between real 'undeceived' life and deceptive dream, as they would do in the work of most moderns, they come quietly together in their own secret, consolatory meaning?" John Bayley should be read in depth, and this selection is a convenient place to start.

As for Christopher Ricks, well, he gives us—as his admired Empson says reading poetry gives us—a taste in the head. This substantial gathering of eighteen essays on poetry, ranging from Gower and Marvell, to Larkin, Lowell, Geoffrey Hill, and including more general excursions on "Lies," "Clichés," and "American English," is no more possible to "use" in the sense of taking notes on, learning to talk better about a writer, than were his earlier books on Milton, Tennyson, and Keats. Yet each of those was superb, as is the new collection. There is the sense in each essay—and Mr. Ricks spells it out in his brief introduction—that it "attends to an aspect, feature, or resource of the language manifested in poetry." So Ricks considers, teases out, helps the language to *show* what it is doing; as with, for example, the self-inwoven simile in Marvell, the relation of sound to sense in Milton, line-endings and "busy prepositions" in Wordsworth, manner in Housman, "story" in Empson, tone in Larkin, and so on. For Ricks, "attending" to the language means, literally, stretching to it, which means listening to it, caring for it, helping it reveal to us (in case the words hadn't already done it by themselves, and often, for me, they haven't until Ricks assists them)

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the prowess, performance and feats of association Frost said critics should be attending to.

Compared to John Bayley, who is at his best, as with the quotation from his Larkin essay, in characterizing richly the manner of a patch of lines, Mr. Ricks is a more intensely verbal critic both in the way he works on the poem's language and in the way his own language works hard at attending to it adequately. A couple of examples out of countless possibilities:

> Take a famous line from "Tintern Abbey" and imagine it as a puzzle for the compositor. 'Felt in the . . . and felt along the . . .' To be slotted in are the words *heart* and *blood*. The expected placing would give: 'Felt in the heart, and felt along the blood,' since the heart is static and the blood is diffused. . . . Yet Wordsworth's line—so famous now as to be exceptionally hard to see as what it is, rather like the plot of *Hamlet*— is 'Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart.' The unobtrusive surprise of the prepositions is a matter of our being tacitly aware of how they might have been expected to figure: deploying them this way round then enables Wordsworth to challenge the presumption that the heart is simply a place and the blood simply diffused; the relationship between the heart and the blood is seen to be more intimate, more mysterious, and more reciprocal than that. The heart has no blood that is not coming from and going to; the blood's coming and going are dependent upon the heart; and this reciprocity . . . can be subtly and touchingly signalled by interchanging their prepositions.

A number of the essays note the workings of what Ricks calls the "anti-pun," as in the line from the first section of Lowell's "Quaker Graveyard" about how the "dogfish barks its nose / On Ahab's void and forehead":

> 'barks'—scrapes—is not a pun on the dog's noise, but, because of the pressure from 'dogfish' it is an anti-pun. 'Barks' there does not mean both 'barks and barks,' nor does it mean 'barks' (scrapes) while not meaning 'barks' (dog's noise); it means 'barks-not-barks,' the whole thing with the fending-off built in.

This improves on Empson, as a way of designating the workings of ambiguity in poetry.

From Wordsworth and Empson it is, for this attender to words, but a step, and a lively one, to Bob Dylan (from the essay, "Clichés"):

> Well, ask me why I'm drunk alla time,
> It levels my head and eases my mind.

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I just walk along and stroll and sing,
I see better days and I do better things.

Ricks says, "The phrase *seen better days* has itself seen better days—that would do as the definition of a cliché. But Dylan brings it from its past into his and our present, by turning it into the present tense, 'I see better days'; and by marrying it to 'and I do better things,' he does a far better thing with it than usual. He eases it from a dim past into a bright present." Just so it happens, we may observe, in Ricks's language here and elsewhere. And it should prompt us to recall William Cain's talk about how "close reading" by itself is not enough. Surely "close reading" as Mr. Ricks performs it, is in a wholly different class, occurs at a wholly different level of intensity and imagination, than does the usual activity constituted by that phrase. Which brings me to my exit message: that whatever one does—reviewing (Larkin), literary-critical sociology (Q. D. Leavis), essayistic definition of an artist's manner (Bayley), or "close reading" (Ricks) can be done with a fullness of invention that makes you wonder whether the "crisis in criticism" wasn't an airy invention by American academics. The best advice is still Jack Teagarden's: Just keep on doin' what you're doin'—preferably as energetically and unapologetically as the four critics considered here.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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EMILY GROSHOLZ

Family Ties

METAPHYSICS, INFORMED BY MODERN BIOLOGY, teaches that we are all of one body, and at the same time radically individuated, down to the last molecule. The family, a network of bloodlines and nest of selves whose sheer closeness magnifies love and opposition, is therefore a likely poetic locus for addressing the family of mankind. Of course, it can also serve as a refuge for those who shrink from the great world; young poets sometimes take it as their topic by default. In this chronicle, I will mostly examine poems about domestic relations. They are not difficult to come by; almost every new book of poetry contains pronouncements on the author's relatives.

The best of them hold their own among poems of more epic theme, voyage and war. For the domestic sphere produces chords resonant as those of any other. And since it is a microcosm, it can take over and transform epic material, as poems of voyage and war may include poignant domestic moments. The worst such poems, however, exhibit the ills of puerility: resentment, self-absorption, poverty of expressive resource and reference. Though domestic poetry characteristically drifts into opaque particularity, as epic degenerates to the inhuman universal, all poets succeed in their art to the extent that they marry both dimensions.

W. S. Di Piero grew up in the Italian-American community of South Philadelphia. His second book, *The Only Dangerous Thing*[1] opens with two monologues which frame his grandparents' voyage from Italy to America. His grandmother speaks at the end of her life, from America, looking back; his grandfather from the Abruzzo, contemplating the unknown future.

Held up by quarantine in Naples, waiting to rejoin her husband, his grandmother watches sailboats in the bay with her infant son on her lap. She dreams of America, "all good things." But the crossing in the "black mouth" of steerage is hellish; only self-possession and stoicism keep her from the madness around her: "People poor and travelling, they are very proud." And the American dream reduces to a bitter reality: her husband dies of pneumonia within two years, leaving her alone in an alien world.

I was the young woman who lived
to bury your grandfather. I learned to speak well,

[1] THE ONLY DANGEROUS THING, by *W. S. Di Piero*. Elpenor Books. $10.00.

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> I went to work in a garment factory, I raised my son,
> and never wanted to marry any man. I tell you this now
> because these are things you must remember.
>
> "Steerage"

Observing the "failing hive" of his village, the grandfather considers America with distrust. He belongs where he is, like a tree or vine planted on the dusty hillside, and he senses that his identity will be lost or wounded if he leaves. All the same, he is caught up in the momentum of mass emigration.

> My wife and young son know me in passing.
> I'll leave them to prepare to meet them.
> It's all right if I eat silence all day,
> cool green olive leaves flashing dark on my skin
> and it spills from me into my boy, and he
> will pass it on to his sons to come, even
> in a mess of cities. I can't praise loneliness
> but I love it as I love the sea crossed
> in a single desperate journey. I know
> I'll have to change my name when I arrive.
>
> "Aurelio"

Di Piero places himself quite subtly in both monologues: the first is addressed to him; in the second, he is the imagined son of the son who is still an infant. He knows that his freedom to choose a name was bought by his grandfather's anonymity, his place in the sun by his grandmother's long years of factory work. All Americans (including native Americans) live by reason of bitter displacements. Di Piero raises these two people to the level of universality in virtue of their grace and courage, and their instantiation of a pattern characteristic of our culture.

In the rest of the book, Di Piero recreates the immigrant world of South Philadelphia through the characters who populated his childhood: Pino the Lizard in his patent leather shoes and fancy cologne ("Pinaud, you dopes. It's French"); Jewana, tormented by the neighborhood kids, a ruined con man whose treasures have dwindled to a shopping bag full of junk; Georgie the saxophonist; Vicenzo Tailor, the adventurer retired to the Old Seaman's Lodge on Chestnut Street; Peppino, Beans, Clams, Yom-yom, "and me," smoking "Camels, my father's brand; / then Gauloises to prove I'm stronger than him / in burning any memory inside that will not sleep."

Good free verse is difficult to write, and in fact rarely encountered. How many people can write lines with no discernible metrical pattern, which avoid the prosaic and retain a pleasing, memorable shape? Di Piero succeeds where many fail, capturing in his monologues a plausible facsimile of speech, which profits from effects

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which regular accentual forms can't produce. For example, he will use multiple stresses set off by a flutter of unaccented syllables for heightened intensity, often at the end of a line: black mouth, all good things, the old new world, the sea crossed. If he falters in his poetic means, it's in the direction of the rather surrealist mode of his first book, and the failing is mixed metaphor: "Butcher's blade lean as paper, glistening through meat seams / like wet lamplit streets slicing into evening shadows." There is, admittedly, something surreal about the street life of South Philadelphia which he remembers.

The Irish poet John Montague tells a similar story, though oppositely directed, in the fourth section of his *The Dead Kingdom.*[2] His family, from Ulster, joined "the embittered diaspora of Northern Republicans," and ended up in Brooklyn. The father preceded; when the mother arrived, he was gone, out at a bar, and she greeted his return with a frying pan. Their reconcilement produced one last child (Montague himself), but the romance with America was short-lived. His mother soon returned to Ireland, where poverty forced her to abandon her youngest to foster care. His father stayed on for two more decades, mostly drunk and out of work, living day to day in Brooklyn boarding houses, unwilling to give up the dream.

By and large, the action unfolds in Ireland. Brooklyn has become a lost idyll, albeit an uncertain and shabby one, where the family was briefly united and his father "found time / to croon to [his] last son."

> Christmas in Brooklyn,
> the Old El flashes by.
> A man plods along pulling
> his three sons on a sleigh;
> soon his whole family
> will vanish away.
>
> "A Christmas Card"

This stanza illustrates Montague's characteristic line: short, rhythmically inventive, with two or three stresses, thickstrewn alliteration and slant rhyme. My sole objection to his style is his habit, perhaps in the interests of velocity, of ending lines with prepositions, articles, and connectives.

When the father returns at last, he is "a small sad man with a hat/ [who] came through the customs at Cobh / carrying a roped suitcase . . . " who manages to live with his sons and wife, now an old woman, for only six more years. But those years are a revelation, bringing sons and parents back into harmony, like this one raised again at Christmas:

[2] THE DEAD KINGDOM, by *John Montague*. Wake Forest University Press. $6.25.

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> . . . my father joining warmly in,
> his broken tenor soaring, faltering,
> a legend in dim bars of Brooklyn
> (that sacramental moment of stillness
> among exiled, disgruntled men)
> now raised vehemently once again
>
> in the valley he had sprung from,
> startling the stiff congregation
> with fierce blasts of song, while
> our mother sat silent beside him,
> sad but proud, an unaccustomed
> blush mantling her wan countenance.
>
> "The Silver Flask"

Montague has an extraordinary ability to depict his parents as they were, apart from his own feelings of disappointment and pain. By forgiving them, he has released them into objectivity, distance allowing sympathy its measure. The author grants his characters their freedom as the child lets go of its parents.

As for his mother, he made friends with her too in her old age, forgiving her his abandonment, sensing that it had also cost her a great deal, as a token discovered after her death revealed: "I never knew, until you were gone, / that, always around your neck, / you wore an oval locket / with an old picture on it, / of a child in Brooklyn." That token transfers its virtue to the hills that guard the city (Cork) where he lives with his new family, wife and child: "powers made manifest, / amulets against loneliness, / talismans for work: / a flowering presence."

Alan Shapiro's first book, *After the Digging*, treated the troubles and diaspora of the Irish. I think he saw an analogy between their sufferings and those of his Jewish forebears; but the translation entailed so much distancing that the characters were obscured. In his second book, *The Courtesy*,[3] he returns to the Jewish neighborhood of his youth. One particularly memorable figure captured by Shapiro's smooth and well-controlled blank verse is "Simon the Barber." The old man accompanies each haircut with a lecture, and refuses to trim sideburns. The law and the mere fact of survival shore him against the terrors he recalls, and he tries to warn the young: the goyim are "Jew-haters, / remember. God forbid you should forget." They don't listen, and he can't understand their loud insouciance, their neglect; in the end, he loses his own son, arrested in a drug raid, and Shapiro too, whose increasingly long hair he gives up on altogether.

> From then on, once again, you were surrounded

[3] THE COURTESY, by *Alan Shapiro*. University of Chicago Press. $12.95; $5.95.

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by enemies more dangerous than any
you had fled—your children, your own seed;
all that you had suffered and survived
and learned, mere ashes in our prayer for the dead.

Shapiro realizes the tragedy inherent in Simon's partial, stubborn wisdom, and forgives him for his lack of forgiveness.

Still, I would greet you, if I had the chance,
though you would pass, and never turn your head;
still, I would greet you, Sir, across the years
as an old enemy to an old friend.

His father, however, is not quite forgiven; fear and guilt still push the words around: "At home, in the slaughterhouse, / the knife of his devouring 'Thou Shalt Not' / cut and shaped you on the block of need." This poem ("Perfect Son") reminds me of Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," except that it acknowledges a difference, as Plath's poem does not, between the real man and the man internalized. Plath's poem is extremely violent, and magically performative: she can kill the man in the poem, who is the man in her heart, who is the man who sired her. Shapiro's poem has violent passages, but they are checked by his reflective awareness that the terrible father is an image of his own fear and speaks with his own voice.

So, by inference, the father-imago could and does speak differently in other poems. "Yahrzeit" portrays his father trying to forgive his own brother, "who died hating him and being hated," through ritual prayer on the anniversary of his death: "He can feel the old estrangements, the golden calf / of grievances their anger forged and worshipped / softening in these words." Ritual, like art, opens a time out of time, where the world can be re-imagined, where the father can find "a brother who can hear him now / and would have prayed for him, and loved him / as he never did . . ." But forgiveness is a long and complicated process in which the loved enemy becomes both more and less than he used to be under the vivid projection of our fear and desire; he cannot simply be wished otherwise. Shapiro comes closest to touching the sources of redemption in "Milking," dedicated to his father. In this pastoral, vaguely sexual allegory of things done right, the simple act of milking unites man and beast, intention and fulfillment. The sun's face, as it rises, mirrors the warm brightness in the pail: "I knew, behind me, the cows were quiet, / lying down into the last dark places / of the dawn darkened barn."

James Fenton is one of the most interesting young poets writing in Great Britain today. He can tell a good story, or rather, intimate a good story, a more thoroughly poetic and difficult undertaking. He can rhyme (an unusual gift these days) to both serious and comic effect. His diction is brilliant and odd; his nonsense verse is di-

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dactic and his realism tastes of the outlandish. Having worked as a journalist in Indochina, Germany, and London, he has a great deal to talk about.

The title poem of *Children in Exile: Poems 1968-1984*[4] presents a family, though in this instance not his own. They are Cambodians, a mother and three children, waiting in Italy for passage to America. By living with them and writing about them, however, he adopts them, taking their concerns and exile to heart. He reminds us, as Di Piero does, what is at stake when the poor and threatened change countries: they risk everything.

> . . . it is we who travel, they who flee,
> We who may choose exile, they who are forced out,
> Take to the hot roads, take to the sea,
>
> In dangerous camps between facing armies,
> The prey of pirates, raped, plundered or drowned,
> In treacherous waters, in single file through the minefields,
> Praying to stave off death till they are found . . .

Eight pages of such deeply felt and deftly constructed quatrains introduce us to an engaging family, remnant of a much larger one destroyed by Pol Pot and his "overseers," that is, to the virulent after-effects of American policy.

At first tormented by nightmares which revive what they have escaped, paralyzed by grief and the sheer unfamiliarity of a new country, they gradually "unfurl, / . . . relax and learn, and learn about happiness." The exuberant loveliness of the Italian countryside in summer, schooling, the support of their Western sponsors, and their own energy bring them around. The children retrieve their penchants for philosophy, mathematics, music and dance; they integrate strange fragments of western culture into a composite wisdom, and come to find genuine delight in a new beginning. Genocide is the most devastating evil mankind has devised. This parable of how people escape and survive it, in soul as well as body, is writing of the highest order.

> Let them come to the crest of the road when the morning is fine
> With Florence spread like honey on the plain,
> Let them walk through the ghostless woods, let the guns be silent,
> The tiger never catch their eye again.

Now we need parables about how people can halt the momentum of genocide in the first place, how in the large and small arenas of

[4] CHILDREN IN EXILE: POEMS 1968-1984, by *James Fenton*. Vintage Books. $5.95.

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human life they can choose to avoid the role of either tyrant or victim.

All four of these poets, then, manage to transform the incidents of family life to the larger, stable form of art. Charity allows them to free their characters from the flatness and implausibility which childish projection ("I want . . ," "I fear . . .") imposes upon them, into the multi-dimensionality of human beings trying to work out their own versions of wholeness within bitter constraints. Each poet employs his sense of social and historical context to exhibit common features of bondage and liberation. And, finally, the command of form in the construction of compelling narrative and of memorable line saves their families from the futile sequence of mere chronology, just one damn thing after another. To regard life *sub specie aeternitatis* is to acknowledge that some experiences, some movements, have an absolute significance. In such cases, time is not abolished, but locally channeled, doubled back on itself, a kind of irrigation system for the garden of memory, or of the poem, to which we can always return.

Judged by such standards, Gerald Stern's *Rejoicings*[5] fails to redeem a troubled past, despite its moments of warmth and comedy, and flashes of eccentric imagination. Its failure of narrative import is echoed at the level of form: brief, irregular lines in brief, irregular stanzas linked by the flat repetition of words or phrases. Josephine Miles has observed that contemporary American poets do not fully exploit the formal resources of repetition in their poetry. In general, they restrict themselves to alliteration, forgetting that repetition at the level of word, phrase, and sentence provides the extra dimension of semantic as well as aural resonance, where each new instance may be subtle amplification, or ironic undermining, of the original.

Stern's repeated phrases, by contrast, are often semantically inert: "it is," "there is," expressions which generally ought to be excised even from good prose. "It is the life. It is the vile reduction. / It is the new one picking flowers. / It is the old one wiping his nose, waving his eye." Sometimes they signal the obsessive and stalled repetitions of pure subjectivity: "I want," "I have to," "I . . ."

> I have to concoct my own past now
> out of old inhalations.
>
> I have to live in two lives
> with the same blood.
>
> I have to separate the thirsts
> without hatred.
>
> "The Unity"

[5] REJOICINGS, by *Gerald Stern*. Metro Book Company. $13.95; $6.95.

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The world of obsession is confused, riddled with the inexplicable; indeed, what Stern inserts into these static repetitions are fragments, pronouns without referents, famous names (Nietzsche, Shelley, Landor, Truman, Ruskin) dropped without a clue. The mysteries thus produced are not the same as the mystery which certainly lies at the heart of human life, despite Stern's suggestion that they are. At various points these poems hint at concerns addressed by the poets just discussed: the Jewish diaspora, translation from a hostile culture and its language to a "new world," growing up poor in a big American city, the assessment of childhood memories, the wisdom of maturity. What exactly Stern makes of these topics is unclear, though it *is* clear that they cause him pain.

Pain is also the keynote of Kate Daniels' *The White Wave*.[6] Her work has a peculiar force which is, however, vitiated by adolescent resentment and sentimentality, and by an incomplete mastery of free verse. A taut, musical free verse line is so difficult to achieve, perhaps most young poets should save it for later, reading quantities of Ezra Pound in the meantime. In this collection, Daniels includes poems about almost every member of her family, and the portraits are quite unforgiving, though she often suggests she is trying to come to terms by writing about them. These people are so reduced in the alembic of her frustrated wishes that they are, as characters, incoherent and unconvincing. Why should we care about them?

Daniels will often place her child-self in a poem in order to play upon the differing perspectives of child and adult. Thus we should learn how her relations to the members of her family evolved. But too often it is the unhappy child's perspective which is tacitly validated: the world inflicts suffering which can only be endured, people push other people around (human interaction is causally determined), events are opaque. In "Family Gathering 1959," she recalls falling against the furnace as an infant, an accident which left her scarred.

> Now my father
> still doesn't know how to touch me. He sees my scars
> and puts his hand like a crown on top of my head
> too roughly and it hurts. Then it's gone.
> He's gone and the unintended roughness starts
> soaking into the strange universe of movement around me . . .

In another poem, she invokes childhood days when she played with her dolls outside in the playhouse while her mother, narcissistic and discontent, despising her husband and her life, beckoned from the bedroom window.

[6] THE WHITE WAVE, by *Kate Daniels*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $6.95p.

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Each of us in our houses: . . .

I never knew why you wanted me.
I was alone out there. I loved you
away from the spectre of your black hair
gleaming in the mirror, your lovely face
talking to itself.

"The Playhouse"

"Why I Don't Write You Anymore" attests that all communication between her and her mother has broken down; despite certain clues (her mother's self-absorption, her suffocating love) and the title, no real explanation is given.

On the dust jacket and in one of the poems, Daniels appeals to the example of the Hungarian poet Miklos Radńoti, executed in a forced labor camp in 1944, and to the social dislocations of recent history. But her own attempts to write about the human condition with compassion fall short. Her moral paradigm is the child victimized by bad luck, disease, accident: "Do you know the sound of children / crying in a hospital at night?" And her solution is mere endurance, or the act of writing about it.

I'll never understand

how we endure it all or why this is the only gift
we give back to god: how much it hurt,
how much we stood up straight and took.

"Not Singing"

This stance is passive, uncomprehending, and sentimental. Daniel's poetic intentions, embodied by Radnóti, are serious, but require a maturity of vision which she has yet to achieve.

Stephen Dobyns, whose *Black Dog, Red Dog*[7] was selected for the National Poetry Series, has already published four collections of poetry. His narrative gift is highly developed; his free verse line moves quickly and with some elegance; and his political sense, while obliquely expressed, is authoritative. (I infer that, like Fenton, he has worked as a journalist and lived in a variety of countries). However, he often shares Daniels' assumption that human violence is inexplicable and overwhelming, that aggressor and victim alike are driven by forces they can never control.

So his many harsh stories of abuse, "Pacos," "Night Swimmer," "Black Dog, Red Dog," "Under the Green Ceiling," "The Gun," "Art," "Truth," and, of course, "Beauty," have little to redeem them. Human evil always harbors an ambiguity, some admixture of

[7] BLACK DOG, RED DOG, by *Stephen Dobyns*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $7.95p.

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love and will corrupted, which makes it both tragic and redeemable. To the extent that Dobyns collapses this ambiguity, his fictions become less convincing and accessible. (Collapse in the direction of piety or silly cheerfulness would have the same effect). He often signals the doom of his characters by using animal similes. "He points the gun at your head . . . / You think back to the time / you saw a friend's cocker spaniel hit by a car . . ."; "you cried out / . . . twisting / like a snake partly crushed by a car"; "when he tore open the bag and saw the arm, he / at first thought it was the leg of a deer." The broken animals here recall Daniels' broken children. One witness (the paper boy) to the spectacle of a man ruined by his incestuous relation with his mother has the following vision, which gives the book its title. Note how in the last line Dobyns turns free verse to powerful advantage: nine stresses in a line of twelve syllables.

> . . . he looks out toward
> red sky and darkening earth, and they seem poised
> like two animals that have always hated each other,
> each fiercely wanting to tear out the other's throat:
> black dog, red dog—now more despairing, more resolved.

In "Under the Green Ceiling," however, Dobyns gives the animal simile a twist which offers some glimmer of hope. The poem opens with two men walking down a country road; one is talking and throwing rocks into an adjacent field, and the other is planning to murder him. At the poem's end, the murder accomplished, Dobyns suggests that there might have been an alternative outcome. The murderer has forgotten (but need not have forgotten?) that his hatred isolates him, cuts him off from human wholeness and in fact makes him a victim too.

> . . . by himself
> he's a fragment of wall, part of a broken pot;
> he's like the quivering rodent under its
> protection of leaves, terrified when the chance
> rock crashes through its green ceiling, victim
> of a world that is endlessly random and violent.

But what shall we make of the last line's hopeless verdict?

Tess Gallagher's seventh book, *Willingly*[8] contains a group of poems about her father's death. They testify to a tender and steadfast filial relationship and to a man who showed the ordinary courage of fathers (like Di Piero's, like Daniels', like mine), that is, he went to work for thirty years even after he had forgotten why.

But Gallagher fails to transform her own memories into memor-

[8] WILLINGLY, by *Tess Gallagher*. Graywolf Press. $12.00; $6.00.

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able poems because her formal means are insufficient. The strongest of these poems, "Boat Ride" and "Black Silk," contain simple, poignant anecdotes which reveal their subject's moral strength.

> In a lull I get him to tell stories,
> the one where he's a coal miner in Ottumwa,
> Iowa, during the Depression and the boss
> tries to send the men into a mine where
> a shaft collapsed the day before, "You'll
> go down there or I'll run you out of
> this town," the boss says. "You don't
> have to run me. I'm not just leaving
> your town, I'm leaving your whole goddamned
> state!" my father says, and he turns
> and heads on foot out of the town, some
> of the miners with him, hitching from there
> to the next work in the next state.
>
> "Boat Ride"

Despite the telling incident, this stanza does not justify its existence as poetry; it might better function as a paragraph in a prose memoir. For there is little verbal music, and the lineation is arbitrary. In fact, when Gallagher strives most for poetic effect, her verse becomes most awkward. Concluding an account of a dream of her father, she writes: "So does / a bird dismiss one tree for another / and carries each time the flight between / like a thing never done." Another poem, about paying homage, begins: "I was taking the little needed, not more, / so the earth could carry me, the way / a tree is able for many birds at once if / they are sure to leave and bear themselves lightly." The management of metaphor is confused, the aural patterning minimal and the grammar pointlessly nonstandard.

Stephen Dunn is an engaging and intelligent poet, whose work rewards close reading, though it sometimes disappoints the ear. My favorite poem in his new collection, *Not Dancing*[9] is "The Routine Things Around the House," which in a mere fifteen tercets wholly transforms the Oedipus myth. On the occasion of his mother's death, Dunn recalls an incident which sums up the modest warmth and acceptance that existed between them, that "permits me to love women easily." Just on the threshold of adolescence, "before the world / unbuttoned its blouse,"

> I had asked my mother (I was trembling)
> if I could see her breasts

[9] NOT DANCING, by *Stephen Dunn*. Carnegie-Mellon University Press. $14.95; $6.95.

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and she took me into her room

without embarrassment or coyness
and I stared at them . . .

A trespassing of the usual proprieties, an acknowledgment of eros between son and mother. The pessimist, so often a sheepish Puritan with the black habit of wolves, predicts that such a gesture will bring down the whole house of culture; we must choose between murder and incest, or their strict renunciation. In this case, however, the mother's judgment and the son's reticence create new but appropriate boundaries for the "trespass," which allows its own mild, but real, gratification.

this poem

is dedicated to where
we stopped, to the incompleteness
that was sufficient

and to how you buttoned up,
began doing the routine things
around the house.

I can also recommend Dunn's respectful poems for his father, "Legacy," "Climbing Ladders Anyway," "Briefcases": "sentimental, for *keep- / sake*, with clarity and without tears," a description which applies as well to his reflections on life with his own family.

Judith Moffett also treats a situation where the proprieties are infringed, and new ones invented, where eros is acknowledged and bounded by affection, in her latest book, *Whinny Moor Crossing*.[10] "Cambridge University Swimming Club, No Public Access to River" describes summer days on a bit of lawn down from Sheep's Green on the river Cam, where Moffett went to swim with colleagues and friends, mostly male, from the University. Club members swim nude, and this gives her the opportunity to describe male bodies with a delight, accuracy, and humor unprecedented in poetry by women.

. . . everywhere in motion:
wobble of standing
languid fishflop of rolling-over
cumbrous swing of striding.
A subtle thickening, lengthening, relapsing
tones our companionship,

[10] WHINNY MOOR CROSSING, by *Judith Moffett*. Princeton University Press. $15.00.

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and the riveting changes
gravity and pushups ring on what was lately
shriveled in the cold river
were waked by idle talk
in what's now quarter-inching darkly
along a sunflushed thigh in curls,
slowly pulling a sweater on over its head.

This sample should illustrate the brilliance and ease of Moffett's style, music which echoes the compelling action, observation which marries nature and artifice. Her moral stance is equally attractive: her characters are thoroughly embodied, sensitive to the stress and allure of what Freud so accurately called *Trieb*, yet their response to it is *action*, self-aware, symbolic, considered, and pleasurable. "In a plain web of titillation and trust," she sits with her friends just outside the threshold of convention, where the body's "friendly nuzzling . . . does not / insist."

The same wisdom informs "Moving Parts," a meditation on the delicate adjustments of both body and soul required to maintain love: "The whole history of couplings / teaches how crazy it is to just let / moving parts look after / themselves . . . Connection's an austere, a temperamental, / a damageable marvel / we're meant to prove we've earned." Moffett's simile of mechanical for erotic coupling is not reductive; rather, she inverts it to make her point that human relations are not causal in determinism's outmoded sense. They are on the contrary always underdetermined, demanding vigilance, responsive to hope. At the end of the title poem, the poet, having found her way out of a rain-blind and pathless moor, stops to admire, *nel mezzo cammin*, the treacherous and lovely landscape she has crossed.

Heather sweep upon sweep—subtle
purples and reds under the vast dead green,
orange soaked from stems the wet wuthering
moves through but hardly moves. Rain
thins, sky lightens. Where I am
I know, and where I'm going; and where I've been
I'll not forget, nor how to get there again.

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JEFFERSON HUNTER

The Nineteenth Century Canvassed

IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY the French art critic and scholar Théophile Thoré wrote extensively on Vermeer, finding in the seventeenth-century painter both pictorialism and realism—qualities to link him with the most important trends in contemporary painting. In the process, of course, Thoré commented on the work of previous critics. In 1976 Francis Haskell, in *Rediscoveries in Art*, commented on Thoré on Vermeer, and in the next year, in a *New York Review of Books* article, Henri Zerner commented extensively on Haskell on Thoré on Vermeer. In 1984 that review, revised, has been gathered with others by Zerner, by the pianist and polymath Charles Rosen, and by Zerner and Rosen writing collaboratively, to form a book called *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art*, which is the work now under review.[1] Comments on comments on comments on comments. The series recedes vertiginously into the past until we reach the young women Vermeer actually painted, who go about their business weighing pearls or pouring milk innocently unaware of the criticism and metacriticism and meta-metacriticism they are engendering. Of course another way to look at the exegetical palimpsest is to define it as the normal business of scholarship. You learn by looking at and through others' opinions as well as at the work itself.

Zerner and Rosen would probably not welcome an association with scholarship, being careful to describe their original enterprise as journalism. It is true that they are opinionated, often in a parenthetical, we're-too-busy-to-argue style—"(It is, by the way, remarkable how Doré took people in, and does again today)." They are also sure of themselves. No evidence accompanies their claim that Romantic artists sought rejection and contempt partly because of the religious implications of the path of suffering. No consideration of generic differences qualifies the sweeping claim that Romantic landscape painters wanted to make the elements of Nature alone carry full symbolic meaning, in a project *identical* with "the contemporary attempt by Wordsworth and Hölderlin to give pure landscape poetry the force and gravity of Milton's and Homer's epic style." No sampling of others' opinions modifies, as it should, the view that John Constable attached "great artistic value" to the next-to-last stage of his successively elaborated scenes (it is true that the painter liked and refused to sell his full-scale oil sketches, but he

[1] ROMANTICISM AND REALISM: THE MYTHOLOGY OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY ART, by *Charles Rosen* and *Henri Zerner*. Viking. $22.50.

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may simply have been sentimentally attached to them; we know that he valued most highly the finished, worked-over canvases he made from the sketches and hoped to sell). In short, not every *i* is dotted and not every *t* crossed, as is perhaps to be expected in a 244-page book entitled *Romanticism and Realism*. And yet Rosen and Zerner's is a learned book, full of good judgment, full of excellent writing, full of tactfully applied knowledge of French art and literature in the nineteenth century. Not only the authors of the books originally reviewed will learn from it. Not only those interested in art history will benefit from its cogent and well-expressed opinions about historical interpretation: "While a purely modern point of view that disregards contemporary evidence is obviously unhistorical, it is unwise to attempt to read the art of a period only on the basis of contemporary views. The choice we are sometimes offered—of imposing our own modern standards on the works of the nineteenth century, or of bowing to standards in sway at the time—is a false one. Both attitudes are uncritical, and neither allows us to grasp the development of new ideals from earlier ones, or to understand what was latent within the era . . ."

"French" ought to appear somewhere in the title. Despite excursions to Caspar David Friedrich and Thomas Bewick, the authors chiefly occupy themselves with Manet, Gérôme, David, Ingres, Delacroix, Courbet, Géricault—and Flaubert, whose banality of subject and artistry of method are persuasively compared to aspects of realistic painting. Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* shows, in subject, nothing—a plain bourgeois burial—and in its painted surface, everything—a massive care for line, texture, *le couleur juste*. (Here Rosen and Zerner develop, as they acknowledge, a comparison made in Albert Boime's 1980 monograph *Thomas Couture and the Eclectic Vision*.)

To the list above should be added other French names: Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, Auguste Glaize (whose *Cupids on the Auction Block* awaits the discerning viewer in the museum at Béziers, ensconced, we are told, behind a large model of a three-masted schooner), Charles Cuisin (painter of a nocturnal *View of Troyes* which even in black-and-white illustration seems eerie, moving, and interestingly akin to scenes by Friedrich). These obscure artists, and others glanced at in the text, are less rehabilitated than redefined, allowed to take their proper place in cultural history. The engaging essay on Bewick's vignettes permits that choleric, sturdily English figure, the William Cobbett of the burin, to exemplify the subjective cancellation of the natural world (Bewick engraved his fingerprint over a country scene). Rosen and Zerner dislike the snobbishness which separates "high" from "decorative" or "minor" art, painters (like David) from mere book illustrators (like Bewick), and they argue strenuously that Romanticism can be defined as a progressive abolition of the hierarchy of genres and of the distinction between central and marginal forms. They believe that a grand generality like "Romanticism" has a meaning which it is possible to elucidate,

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and that "avant-garde" and "official" or "salon" art are similarly meaningful, though not simple, categories. They want no part of current efforts to deny artistic categories and deconstruct artistic ideologies. In their view, ideology always remains a force in the nineteenth century, whether it turns Delacroix (and Bewick, with his wood engravings fading out into the text page) to the typically Romantic "strongly centered composition with an indefinite periphery," or Thomas Couture and his circle to "*le juste milieu*" (roughly speaking, the middle-of-the-road position between the conservatives and the innovators).

Some of the reviews-turned-essays of this book are rather on the periphery themselves: "The Recovery of the Past and the Modern Tradition" belabors the limitations of Haskell's views of Thoré; "The Reproductive Image and Photography" does little but summarize the argument of Peter Galassi's *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*; and "Caspar David Friedrich and the Language of Landscape" quarrels at length with a German scholar's (admittedly over-schematized) interpretations of Friedrich. The essays on Romanticism as a permanent revolution, on Realism and the avant-garde, on Couture and Bewick, and especially on official art and its ideology of the finely finished or "licked" surface, are much more interesting and much more pertinent to Rosen and Zerner's announced aims. Indeed, readers might profitably begin with "The Ideology of the Licked Surface: Official Art," though it is placed last in the book; it seems to be Rosen and Zerner's starting point (in its original form it was their first collaborative effort on the subject) and announces their leading ideas with clarity and force. It also defines, amusingly, some terms used earlier in the book: *pompiers* or "firemen," for example, as a title for the officially rewarded, Salon-supported painters of vast historical canvases, *grandes machines*—Delaroche's *The Little Princes in the Tower of London*, Couture's *Romans of the Decadence*. Bouguereau, the arch-pompier, though of the sentimental rather than histrionic sort, comes in for some caustic comment in this essay; persuasive comment too, once the reader has sorted out the labeling mistake in illustration captions. *Early Morning* is on the *right*, *Alma Parens* on the *left*; the two paintings are correctly identified in the text discussion. This is an odd mistake in a book otherwise distinguished for its own *fini*, its own intellectually burnished and fussed-over surface. No question of licking here, of course. *Romanticism and Realism* is not a *grande machine* announcing its own high-priced importance ("The *fini* became the guarantee for the bourgeois, and especially for the great bourgeois known as the state, against being swindled"). It is a book careful of its details, devoted to its ideas, and informed about the complications of its subject. Rosen and Zerner seem as qualified for their task as, say, Bouguereau for the painting of *Zenobia Found by the Shepherds on the Shore of the Araxes*, and in their case the final product seems destined for a longer popularity.

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ROBERT McDOWELL

Letter from England

DEAR H,

English and American manners really are different, especially in literary circles. My friend, Lysa, and I blundered into this hard knowledge last July on our first visit to London. After a frenetic week of theatre-hopping, sightseeing, and shopping in that marvelous city, we were gathered up by the poet, Herbert Lomas (called "Bertie" by his friends), and driven to a "Pre-Raphaelite" party at a castle in Norfolk—the home of George MacBeth and his wife, Lisa St. Aubin de Teran, the novelist.

After a harrowing journey (our first experience with driving at breakneck speed on the wrong side of the road), our tires spat gravel as we halted, idling at a crossroad opposite a Wordsworthian lane. Bertie was uncertain; we suffered visions of eight-lane freeways with exit signs larger than the car we were sitting in. Suddenly Lysa pointed at a young couple strolling toward us up the lane. They were lean and languid, arm-in-arm and wrapped up in each other, oblivious to this or any other century.

"Pre-Raphaelites," I said to Bertie. "Go." And he did.

A quarter mile down the winding lane the castle, all turrets and warm brick in the dazzling summer weather, came into our sights. I suppose by our standards of Edward I that MacBeth's castle is modest, but to my suburban American eye it *was* impressive. Even Snow White's castle at Disneyland is a shabby affair compared to it. We followed handmade *parking* signs posted to oaks for another half-mile or so until we came to a clearing crowded with Datsuns, Volvos, Peugots, and Porsches. Getting out we followed handmade *party* signs through an arch in a tall hedge, which opened onto a circular gravel drive, a luscious lawn, and the front entrance. Couples lounged on the grass, some in Pre-Raphaelite dress, some dressed "NOW," the costumes of others depicting periods ranging from the Renaissance to the roaring twenties. Children made up to resemble Charles Dodgson's favorites played tag or tormented each other.

I must interrupt my narrative to stress that our manners differ. As we strolled toward the couples on the green Lysa and I did not know that we were about to enter gulfs of nuance: separations of speech. We didn't know that with strangers the English are open and confiding until you insist on an exchange of names. Upon that inevitability they cringe a little and shoot furtive, sidelong glances at

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you as they yearn to break away, restless for the mysterious encounter of intimate anonymity. But you'll see what I mean.

We approached the couples on the green. In deference, I'm certain, to his American guests, Bertie bravely broke with tradition. Outside the entrance he introduced me to a woman, an acquaintance of his.

"This is my American friend, John McDowell. Sorry, Robert." The woman looked stricken.

"John-Robert McDowell? Or John McDowell-Robert? And you're a poet?"

"You've heard of the composer," Bertie said. "MacDowell."

"Ah," she said. "You write music. Yes, I've heard your work."

Mumbling something about the rigors of composing edifying waltzes in the nuclear age, I hurried into the Great Hall and Yankee luck was with me again. Pausing momentarily by the blaze of the walk-in fireplace I spotted an alcove lit by stained-glass windows from which the green and golden likenesses of Shelley, Keats, and Byron looked down on a massive cache of claret. The room was pregnant with the seed of the vineyards of France, and I walked in determined to bring off a flawless delivery. I pulled one cork after another under the forlorn eyes of the Romantics and imagined myself godfather to the terrific spirit emanating from that room and infecting everyone in attendance. Americans suffer grandiose visions. As it subsided I swaggered out to find food.

It wasn't hard. In the next room a banquet had been laid, and dishes resembling photographs in culinary magazines were still arriving. Our host stood off to one side dressed in the lincoln green velvet uniform of a nineteenth-century cavalry officer. He smiled at us.

"Eat!" he thundered. I squashed the impulse to salute and click my heels, but we snatched up plates and turned to the table with militaristic flair. A gentleman spoke to Lysa as they picked at one of three partially decimated birds, and when she responded his accent vanished. He became an American.

Back in the Great Hall we slouched against the fireplace with our claret and food and wondered how many other Yanks were there disguised as Brits. We observed the Great Hall and an adjacent drawing room, too.

The rooms were designed in contemporary flea market. Antique furniture and prints representing every conceivable period of western endeavor cluttered the ancient rooms and oddly complemented the Victorian color scheme on the walls. The effect was pleasantly eccentric. As Americans we felt right at home. We recognized kindred spirits, immigration tastes. Then Bertie wandered by to check on us, and we assured him that we were fine.

"Then I won't take you round and introduce you. Just talk to whoever you like." We smiled, catching on. We began to embrace

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the theory of intimate anonymity. We wandered. We mingled. We observed George Barker lean forward in the midst of conversation and startle Bertie with a little peck on the lips. Then Barker allowed how, of course, he had syphilis. We eavesdropped—"Pre-Raphaelite? What's *that*?"—"You say *who* slept upstairs last night?"—"Well, of course, I think his last book was wretched. Oh! Here he comes . . . Hullooo!" We were amused by two pouting Smith girls who juggled most of the male, middle-aged literati who were present and lined up to cheer them.

Then it happened. As I always do I spilled claret down a leg of my white pants. As I sheepishly lurched to the car to change into denim (durable, deceiving denim), Lysa surprised sequestered couples in the rose garden with her wide lens Nikon. They took it well, and when I rejoined her we found ourselves strolling with an unknown couple and talking about Wales.

"I was born in Wales," the man said. "Though we live in London we still have a house in Cardiff. When will you be visiting the south?"

"In a couple of weeks," I said.

"I wonder if we'll be down there," and he glanced at his wife for clarification. She gave him that certain look and he hummed his uncertainty. "Too bad," he said. "I thought we might get together."

It didn't feel right to me, nearly receiving an invitation to someone's home without an exchange of names. I introduced Lysa and myself and experienced an immediate pang of misgiving for having done so. The man and woman withdrew, faintly resembling flowers that have lost the afternoon sun.

"I'm Dannie Abse," the man murmured.

"*The* Dannie Abse?" I blurted. Dannie Abse, or the man purporting to be Dannie Abse, shrank as if I had struck him. His petals folded. I'd flubbed it, I knew.

"Are you sending me up?" he said, finally. I was confused. I took a step back. I stammered.

"What do you mean?" He looked like a tight vessel of pain. I blushed, ashamed of my zeal and wide reading.

"I know your work."

"You're sending me up," he said. He looked to Lysa for confirmation, for the punchline. "He's sending me up, right?" Lysa, who had been talking to the man's wife, grabbed my arm. "What did you say?"

I explained. She looked at the man, relieved that I had not been transformed into The Ugly American.

"He's not putting you on," she said. "If he says he knows your work, he knows it."

"I don't know if he's putting me on," he said, "but I think he's sending me up." He tried to laugh; it came out like a rattle.

"Look," I said, "are you Dannie Abse, the poet?"

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"I write poetry."

"Is there another English Dannie Abse who writes poetry?"

"*I'm* Dannie Abse," he said.

"Then I know your work!" But it was too late. We were conversational flops, phrasemakers with separate linguistic keys who from the shadows of dim perception offered each other our separate apologies. Moments later we parted, and Lysa and I returned to explore the upper floor of the castle.

The first room we entered, the one with the two stuffed owls above the door, appeared to be our host's study. An antique pair of regimental field glasses lay on a table below the west window. A decrepit Remington typewriter rusted regally on a little table across the room, and a large, tidy desk stood in the middle. There was one book on its blotter, a new book of poems by Dannie Abse. I opened it. It was inscribed to our host and signed by Dannie Abse. I showed it to Lysa.

"*The* Dannie Abse," I said, and put it back on the desk.

Downstairs the traveling video library had arrived and set up equipment and a huge screen in the Great Hall. A woman mumbled her disapproval, recalling how at the last party here she'd seen a fire-eater performing in the rose garden. We took up our first post beside the fireplace and watched Pre-Raphaelite children swaying to Michael Jackson's "Beat It." Moments later George Barker joined them, then others, everyone dancing to "Beat It." I thought of Edward I and the three stained-glass witnesses in the nearby claret room; I thought about what a wonderful day it had been; I thought about what advice I might give my friends Mark Jarman or Liam Rector, or any young Yank poets visiting England for the first time.

My advice would be simple: maintain and respect the theory of intimate anonymity and you will enjoy fine food and drink. You will be regaled by amusing anecdotes. You will hear the scoop on the other strangers, and you will gain practical information. You may even receive, as we did, prolonged and colorful instruction on the lighting and maintenance of coal fires. Heading for a month-long residence in a house on the Irish Sea, I should have thanked the gentleman who taught us how to burn coal, but I never asked him his name.

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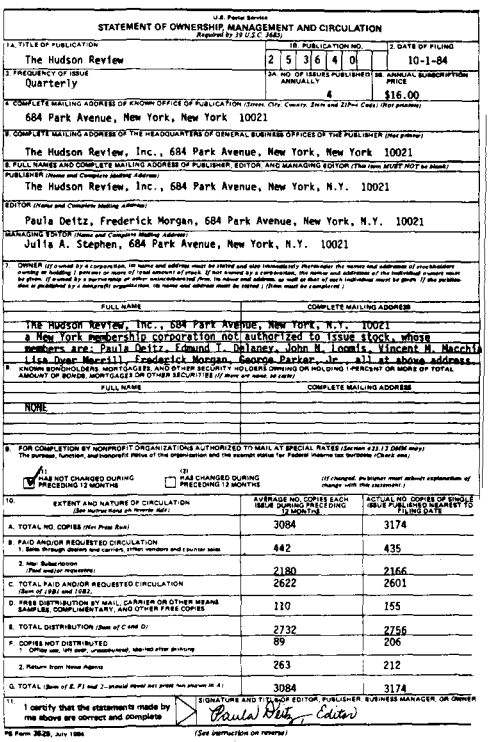

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